

AN
EXAMINATION
OF SOME
ARGUMENTS
IN AN
ESSAY

ON THE
Nature, Extent, and Authority
OF

Private Judgment
In Matters of Religion.

By PHILALETHERS.

*Yea, and why even of your selves judge ye not what is
right? Luk. 12. 57.*

*Prove all things, hold fast that which is good, 1 Thess.
5. 21.*

L O N D O N,

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THE PREFACE.

THE *Writer of these Sheets being a Lover of Truth, which he thinks requires no other Authority but its own natural Light and Strength to recommend it, does very heartily joyn with the Author of the Essay in sincere Endeavours to promote it.*

But though we are both agreed in the End of our Searehes, we shall be found pretty widely to differ in our Means to obtain it.

I must profess my self an utter stranger to the Person of this Author, and so hope I shall not be suspected to Write in opposition to any thing but his Opinion, which I take to be of a very dangerous Nature, and to strike at the Foundation of all Religion. For if Publick Judgment be to determine what is Truth, Judaism, Mahometism, or what you please may be so established, and Men obliged in Conscience to believe it; and thus the same Authority which can settle one Religion, may destroy another; and what does this end in, but in the Dissolution of all?

However, thus far, as to what concerns our selves under the Christian Dispensation, we may safely go, and affirm, That from this Principle many Anti-Christian Errors have already been Established in the Church, and that it is capable, when thoroughly imbibed, of extirpating the whole Gospel Revelation: And therefore it is scarce to be imagined, that the All-

The Preface.

wise Author of it should put its Guardianship into such a Method, or must apparently hazard its total Destruction.

pag. 7. Our Author seems to be somewhat sensible of the vast Importance of this Point, when he insinuates, that the Doctrine he advances is only the result of his own single Private Judgment, and that not perfectly determined; since he encourages any other Private Judge to offer his Thoughts upon this Subject, Pref. pag. and promises to accept friendly whatever Assistance 15. it affords him towards a Discovery.

Upon such Encouragement I willingly take this Pains to recommend my self to his Favour; and that he may not think me wholly undeserving of it, I shall premise here some Particulars in which we are fully agreed, which will make the way the clearer for the finding out the Truth as to those Points in which we shall appear to differ.

We are agreed then, as far as I can judge by our Author's outward Profession, in a hearty Approbation of the Church of England, and look upon her as one of the purest and most uncorrupt Parts of the Catholick Church, and as coming the nearest to the Primitive and Apostolick Pattern, both as to Doctrine and Worship, in the three first Ages of Christianity: And we think it redounds very much to her Strength, as well as to her Honour, that she allows greater pag. 145. Privileges to Private Judgment, than any other Church or Congregation in the World; which is an Argument, that she is built upon the Foundation of Truth, and needs not the Arts of blinding her Members with the darkest Ignorance to keep them in her Communion. No! She receives no Rule of Faith, but the Scriptures themselves, and does not take upon her magisterially to judge of Controversies, and by her own bare Authority to determine them; but allows all due Liberty to every Private Judgment, and

The Preface.

and obtrudes no Doctrines upon us, but what carry their own Weight and Conviction along with them, as being either expressly contained in Scripture, or evidently deducible from it, and whatever is contrary to Art. 20. this, is openly rejected by her.

How near soever then our Essay-*Author* may be pag. 146. willing to bring her to Intallibility, she does herself in her own Articles disclaim the thing, and declare, that as several Churches have erred, so Art. 19? there is none but what may; and, I hope, no Private Judgment can be obliged to submit to their Determinations when they do.

Wherefore, though the Zeal of this *Writer* in complimenting her with a foreign Authority may be pardonable, as being kindly intended for her Service; yet possibly it will be thought by some not so Prudent, as fastening a real Dishonour upon her by the Suspicion it carries of her needing it.

I cannot therefore run so great a Length as our *Author* in Zeal and Service to the Church, as to follow Her, when she departs from Truth: For though I may own her, as he does, to be the purest and pag. 146. best constituted Church upon Earth, yet I need not go so far as to exalt her by meer Imagination, into so glorious and triumphant a State at present, as to say, she hath neither Spot nor Wrinkle, nor Eph. 5. 27. any such thing; we must indeed be Followers of the Ministers of the Gospel, but so far only as 1 Cor. 11. they follow Christ; and we must not so adhere to 1. the Stewards of the Mysteries of God, as to forsake 1 Cor. 4. 1. God himself our great Lord and Master, and the giver of all Grace, who hath called us into 1 Pet. 5. his Eternal Glory by Christ Jesus. 10.

But notwithstanding our *Author's* entire Submission of all his Enquiries after Truth, to the Judgment of the Church, whose Interest he is resolved to Espouse, I pres. pag. find him somewhat wavering in this Resolution, and o. for

The Preface.

for fear of depending upon Numbers in the Church for the Settlement of his Religion, to whom in some places he seems to resign himself, in another place he applies to a single Infallibility, and acquiesces in the consummate and incorrupt Judgment of but one, who yet is not the Head of his own, but of another Province: So that in his fixing the Seat of Truth, he seems to be certain of nothing, but that it is not to be found in himself, and thinks it a manly Resignation, and a Foundation for Glory, that he can with great Modesty depend upon Others, and fly to Authority for his Security.

I will not call this a tame and slavish Principle, or any such hard Names as may discourage an humble and distrustful Searcher after Truth, but only say, that 'tis a lower Piece of Submission to the Judgment of other Men, than Christianity allows us to Practice.

Another particular in which our Author and the Writer of this Paper are agreed, is, a very high Esteem, and great Veneration for that most Reverend Prelate, to whom the Dedication of the Essay is directed; whose Integrity and incorrupt Judgment has been very Conspicuous, and whose Courage and Constancy in opposition to Popery, when it once attempted the overthrow of our pure Established Religion, ought to be gratefully remembred by all our Protestant Posterity. And I could with as great Confidence appeal to his Grace's consummate Wisdom, as our Author, for a final Determination of this Controversy, notwithstanding he has been before hand with me, though possibly without any Encouragement so to do, by sheltering himself under his Grace's Protection, and by using his great Name to influence or awe the World into favourable Thoughts of his Performance.

But I would not have this acknowledgment of his Graces eminent Virtues, whatever our Author may insinuate by His, be constru'd as any Supposition of the want

The Preface.

want of the like *Virtues* in others of the same high Order, whose great Learning and Piety have been happily *Instrumental* in preserving us from the Tyranny of *POPERY*, and the Disorders and Confusion of the other Extream; they have never been wanting, as often as there has been just Occasion, to put themselves into the *GAP* for our Defense. And one of them of the highest Dignity, has by his learned Labours sufficiently demonstrated to the World his Aversion to *POPERY*, and whose Principles are too well known to be suspected of the least Tendency towards the Encouragement of *F ACTION*; and therefore his Life is justly esteemed a very great Security and Defense to us against the Designs and Attempts of both.

There is another Particular in which our Author and I do not seem to differ, and that is, in a sincere Belief of the Gospel Revelation, and of all those Truths which are taught us in the inspired Writings of the Old and New Testament, which are acknowledged to contain the whole Will of God, and by which our Faith and Practice ought to be regulated.

From premising these things in which we agree, I shall be the better able to proceed, without being misapprehended, in the Examination of the several Arguments which are produc'd to dresse Private Judgment of what I conceive its just Authority: But I must take notice by the way, that our Author does scarce any thing else but negatively dethrone it, by inferring imaginary Absurdities from the supposing it, and shewing how unfit it seems to be, in his Opinion, for the Guide and Government of Humane Actions: He is very tender of placing another Judge in its room, and of telling us positively whose Judgment we must universally follow, when we have, with all
due

The Preface.

*Pref. pag. due Submission to our elder Brethren, rejected
7. our own.*

I would only here take notice further of one universal Mistake which runs through his whole Composition, and which he builds much upon, and which may serve as a Key to open the Weakness of most of his Arguments; and that is, His supposing that Opinion makes Truth, and from thence inferring, That if Private Judgment were our Guide to Truth, Contradictions might be true, because private Men may have Contradictory Opinions: But he should have consider'd, that Mens Opinions alter not the Nature of things; that Truth is certain and immutable, whatever Mens Conceptions are concerning it; and that tho' Men may sometimes innocently mistake it, yet that all Ignorance and that all Mistakes are not excusable, but may deserve, and without doubt will receive, an equitable and proportionable Punishment.

But I have done now with my General Reflections, and shall proceed to consider distinctly the several particular Arguments that are offer'd to invalidate the Authority of Private Judgment in Matters of Religion; and I shall take them just in that Method and Order in which I find them in the Essay.

Page 8. Line 17. for Page 30. Read Page 6.

An EXAMINATION of some ARGUMENTS, &c.

CHAP. I.

THE Author of the Essay introduces his Discourse with an *Observation* concerning the *Jewish Church*, which does not at all conclude in his Favour, but rather very much against him; 'Tis this, that every Prophet who was sent to that People, was obliged to prove his Mission by some *Miracle*, before the Divine Authority of his Message was acknowledged, and Men obliged to receive it: And that this was the Case of the *lesser Prophets* in particular, though their Embassy were no more then to explain what had been already more obscurely *Revealed*. Now the Conclusion which I should draw from this, and which seems most naturally and directly to follow from it, is, that under the *Gospel Revelation*, which is declared to be the *last* which shall be ever offered to Mankind, there is as much Reason to expect some such *Divine Testimony* from all such Persons as pretend *Authoritatively* to impose upon the Judgments of others, this or that particular Sense of very abstruse and difficult, and controverted places of it, as there was under the *Jewish Law*; and more especially so, if the pretence be to add such things as Wise and Learned, and unprejudiced Men, cannot think contained in it.

Chap. I. But perhaps our Author will not look upon, this Inference as much affecting the *Church's Power*, whose Authority he often calls *Divine*, as being conferred upon her by the Author of the same Revelation, which she is the Guardian of, and confirmed by the same Miracles which attested the Truth of it. Now the Church's Authority being *Divine*, is what we do not dispute against. To far as the Scripture allows it; which certainly must confine it to the inculcating only such Truths as it contains, and not suffer it to exceed those Powers which that Charter has granted it. But what further Authority this Writer would have her *Divinely Commissioned with*, by contending that she is a *Body Politick*, and has a *Legislative Power*; I must profess my self a stranger to, and will wait for my Information, till the Advancer of these Assertions shall explain himself.

pag. 5.

pag. 3.

So that it is not the Church's *real* Authority, that *private Judgment* must oppose; but when she *Usurps* that Dominion over Mens Consciences, which there is no Revelation to justify. And here the grievance is, that *Reason*, which our Author so justly calls the *Weakness* of Man, must presume so far as to judge what is or is not Revelation; which puts me in mind of an Expression of Arch-Bishop Tillotson, "That we need not desire better Evidence that any Man is in the *Wrong*, than to hear him declare against *Reason*, and thereby acknowledge, that *Reason* is against *Him*". I could not indeed call that *Reason* which should go against and oppose it self to the *Wisdom and Revelation of God*, and so can joyn with our Author in terming it *Weakness*, or *Folly*, or *Madness*. But, I hope, he will not give any of those names to *Reason*, that goes with *Revelation*, and divest it of all Strength and Authority, merely because 'tis *Private*; since this would

be

be to judge of *Truth* only by *Numbers*, and then Chap. I.
 it would generally be *out-voted*. And an Argument is not one jot the *stronger* for having its *Vouchers Numerous*. So that though *Reason* must submit to *Revelation*, yet *Reason* may combat *Reason*, when called in as a help to *understand* it. And that which has the greatest degree of *Light* and *Evidence* on its side, must and ought to prevail, and have its *Victory* proclaimed in the *Judgment* of every *Enquirer*, who impartially searches after *Truth*. And its being either *Publick* or *Private*, does not in the least affect the *Merits* of the *Cause*, or afford any additional *Strength* for our *Conviction*. And though the *Publick* may have just *Cause* to adhere to the belief of some particular *Truths*, which every private *Person* cannot fully comprehend; yet I cannot look upon the *Foundation* of their *Establishment* to be, a mere *Defiance* to the common pag. 4.
Sense of *Mankind*, to which our *Author* is not willing there should be any *Appeal*.

But it is said, that this *Claim* of *Private Judgment* has been the *Cause* of many *Heresies* and pag. 3.
Schisms in the *Church*, which have been spawned and engendred from this *Principle*. But this *Objector* does elsewhere acknowledge, that this likewise has been the consequence of *Publick Judgment* pag. 138.
 ment, and that *Heresies* have been established by *Synods*, and that several of the *Councils* of the *Church* have gone a great way in corrupting *Religion*; and I believe too he will not deny, but that more *Persons* have been called *Hereticks*, and that by *Publick Judgment*, than have deserved that *Name*, which I think carries something more in it than a bare erroneous *Judgment*. And therefore I cannot entertain such favourable *Thoughts* of this *Sin*, which *St. Paul* reckons among the *Works* of the *Gal. 6:14*
Flesh, as to esteem it no more then the bare mis- 20.

Chap. I. apprehension of Truth; and so must conclude, contrary to the *charitable* Opinion of this Author, that there never were any *Publick* or *Private Heresies*, but what had something either of *Contention*, *Vain-glory*, *Pride*, *Conceit*, *Envy*, I will add *Ambition*, *Love of Dominion*, and *worldly Interest*, or *some such other Diabolical and Malevolent Origin*.

pag. 3.

pag. 6.

Unless then *Bodies of Men* can be demonstrated to be less liable to the Infection of these Vices, and the Dominion of them than *single Persons*, which I think what our Author advances at his 127th Page does not do; That *Heresies* owe their Rise from hence, can be no more a prejudice against the Judgment of the *One*, than of the *Other*; and since in Fact we find, that as much Disturbance, and as many Ill-consequences have arisen, to the great detriment of Religion, to the danger of the Church, and the hazard of Men's Eternal Salvation, not to mention the Cruelties and Barbarities to Men's Bodies, from the Tyranny and Oppression of *Publick Judgment*, as there ever have done from a vicious and conceited *Private One*; the lovers of Truth must undoubtedly have a right to examine the pretences of *Both*, and to reject the *Abuses* of just Authority in the *One*, and to correct the mistakes of pretended Reason in the *Other*. And the only Damage the Church would receive from hence would be, but the want of an *infallible standing Judge* to determine finally all controverted Opinions, which I conclude it might with Charity subsist without, since it has not pleased Almighty God to assign us one. But to come to our Point.

Our Author's *first Chapter*, which is one of the *largest*, is spent in confuting a Notion which I hope is not entertained by many; I can scarce think it any one's sober Thoughts, that *Private Judgment*

ment is so much its own Sovereign, as to be subject Chap. I.
to no Rule, and Unaccountable, and if it errs, not pag. 19.
Punishable. And yet he joyns another Notion pag. 8:
with it contradictory of the former, the presumptu-
ous Claim it makes of choosing what Law or Reli-
gion it will walk by, which very choice is the sub-
mitting to it as its Rule. And then he proceeds
to mix them together, and hopes to make the ab-
surd consequences of the One, beat down what
is reasonable in the demands of the Other.

It is necessary therefore, that we make some
Distinction between them, and first settle our No-
tions of Private Judgment, and what Privileges it
pleads for, before we proceed any further to in-
validate those Arguments he advances to oppose
them. And this will justify the passing over, or
at least the considering but slightly such of them
as do not appear to affect the dispute between
us.

To distinguish then between the two Parts of
the proposition our Author confounds, that Private pag. 32:
Judgment is not, nor can be, the sole Guide or Rule in
matters of Religion, which he says amounts in o-
ther Terms to this, that no Man is to judge for
himself, what he is to Believe and Practice. Now
I grant him one Part of his Proposition, which he
makes the whole in his Conclusion, that Private pag. 32:
Judgment is not the sole Rule in matters of Religion.
But that it is not the sole Guide to direct us in
the Application of our Rule, or that Men by their
own Private Reason are not to choose of what Religi- pag. 9:
on they will be, and in what Sense they are to under-
stand the several Articles of it, is what I think
our Author's Reasons, and consequential Absurdi-
ties do not sufficiently evince. The Rule by
which Men must regulate their Judgments, is
fixed and certain, and is without doubt the Will
and Law of God, both as it is naturally written
in

Chap. I. in the *Heart*, which we call *Right Reason*, and as it is supernaturally declared in *Scripture*, which we term *Revelation*. But the *Application* of both these parts of our Rule, as well as the choice of it, as to what we are to *Believe and Practice*, is what I assert in opposition to our Author, to be the business of *Private Judgment*, by the Authority of which we ought to be determined; and I shall now run over the *Reasons* which are offered to the contrary, and shew the *Inconclusiveness* of them. These are numerous, but a *short Answer* will serve most of them, and some require none.

pag. 9. His first Argument *ab absurdo*, that there could be no *Heresy* or *Schism* in the Church, if *Private Judgment* had such Authority, does not at all affect our Dispute, because it follows only the supposition, that *Private Judgment* has no Rule by which it ought to be directed, which is not contended for, but the contrary granted; and therefore it can by no means be concluded, that 'tis impossible *Heresies* should arise, unless it were impossible that Men should be *Proud*, or *Obstinate*, or *Ambitious*, or give way to any *Spiritual* or *Fleshly Vice*, which may pervert their *Judgments*, or corrupt their *Practice*; which may render them sufficiently culpable to be adjudged *such Criminals*, as have manifestly forsaken the Rule of both.

pag. 10. And the same may in a great measure be said to what is objected as to the *Being of the Church*, and its *Unity*, which he urges would hereby be dissolved. For sure Men who acknowledge the same Object of Religious Worship, and receive the same Rule of their Faith, may joyn in the same common methods of Devotion, and keep up a *Christian Union*, without their agreement in every particular *Private Opinion* in Matters very *abstruse*; and which perhaps the Divine Wisdom has

has purposely veiled with *Obscurity*, that there may Chap. I.
 be room left us to exercise our *Moderation*, and
 entertain *favourable* and *charitable* Thoughts of
 each other. And to advance any *Human Deter-*
minations, and require the Conformity of Men's
 Judgments to them, either *opposite* to, or even
beyond what God in his written Word has di-
 rected, is indeed a violation of the Principles of pag. 142

Nature, and the destroying that *Liberty of Judg-*
ment in which He has indulged Mankind, and
 for which they are only accountable to Him.

And to take away our Author's *Fears* of the
 Church's *Unity* being dissolved by a Diversity of
 Opinions in it, I will direct him to a *Writer* of
 good *Authority*, who advises to a better Method of
 preserving it. ' There is an easie and effectual

' way of curing Church-Divisions, says he, with-

' out a Judge of Controversies; nay, without

' making all Men of a Mind in every thing,

' which must never be expected in this World;

' And that is, not to make the necessary Terms

' of Communion streighter and narrower than

' Christ has made them, nothing but what is

' plainly reveal'd in Scripture, and is essential

' to Christian Faith and Worship; For such Mat-

' ters most Christians agree in, and tho' they

' may have some private Opinions of their own,

' this ought not to divide Communions, while

' they do not impose them upon the Faith of

' others, nor introduce any new and strange

' Worship into the Christian Church.

As to the *Law* given by *Moses* to the *Jews*, and

the *Moral Law* implanted in the Hearts of *Man-*

kind, they are both *Rules* of *God's Establishment* :

And tho' private *Judgment* had not Authority to

disannul them, yet it was to be us'd in the appli-

cation of them : And tho' it might be mistaken,

and apply them *wrong*, yet that could not alter

the

Discourse
concerning
a Judge of
Contr. Ans
 1686.
 pag. 55.

Chap. I. the Obligation of them, or justify either *Corah's*
 pag. 11. Rebellion against the *One*, or *Epicurus's*, *Aristo-*
phanes, or *Vaninus's* Violation of the *Other*, not-
 withstanding we should grant, that each of them
 did actually follow the present Dictates of their
 own *Consciences* or *Judgments* : For these it must
 be acknowledg'd by all, are sometimes culpably
 blinded : So that *Virtue* and *Vice*, *Obedience* and
Rebellion will still carry their contrary Obligations,
 whatever *Mens Opinions* are concerning them,
 and what may seem to justify a Man's Conduct to
Himself, will not always excuse him to his *Maker*,
 which is a common *Mistake* with our Author.

The next Argument, That this Power of pri-
 pag. 12. vate Judgment would multiply *Religious* in the
 World, admits of the same Answer as his *second*,
Page 30th, That the *Church's Unity* would be de-
 stroyed by it : It is indeed the *very same*, but it
 might possibly be thought serviceable to his
 Cause, by its having only an appearance of an
Addition to his *Number*.

pag. 13. That *Human Laws* would be in danger from this
Hypothesis does not follow, because the *Divine*
Will, which is the *Rule of Private Judgment*, is the
 Guardian of them, and has put a *Sanction* upon
 them which obliges the *Conscience* to *Obedience*, so
 far as 'tis fit and reasonable it should, and as *God's*
Laws do allow ; So that we cannot violate them
 without breaking our *Rule*, which is originally culpable.

pag. 14. And as for the security of the *Religion* of any
Country, or the *Church* as by *Law Established*, there
 can no more of this suffer by the just Authority
 of *Private Judgment*, than what appears to be
 contrary to the Powers granted it by the original
 Charter of *Scripture* : Nay, even this *Tyranny* and
Usurpation may possibly remain as to the *Publick*
 notwithstanding, since *Private Judgment* has no
 further Jurisdiction than over the *single Persons* in
 whom

whom it is seated. And that consideration me- Chap. I.
thinks may obviate all the fearful Apprehensions
of admitting it, since the *Publick Judges* may
still remain *Tyrants* and *Usurpers*, and find *Slaves*
enow to keep up their *Dominion*.

Neither does it follow from hence, that all En- pag. 14.
deavours and Engagements among Men to propagate
the Gospel, or reform Mankind, must be mischievous
Designs, or impious Cabals; unless the attempting
to instruct the Ignorant, to undeceive the Erro-
neous, and to convert the Vicious, by turning
them out of the road to Hell, and leading them
into the way to Happiness, can be reckoned such.
For to repeat again, what I have already incul-
cated, the Opinions of Men are not the Standard
of Truth, but only the Guide of their Actions; and
we are as much accountable to God for the *Reck-
titude* of our Thoughts as of our Manners. It is not
therefore indifferent to Men what they sincerely
believe, or a Disservice to them to put their Judg-
ments right, when they are mistaken, unless
there were no difference in the nature of Things, and
God would have no regard to our acting accor-
dingly.

And this consideration invalidates the force of
his next Objection, that the Christian Ministry and pag. 15.
Priesthood would upon this bottom be useless and
unnecessary, which it can never be, not to mention
the other Parts of their Office, as long as there is
need of Instruction to preserve Men from Igno-
rance, and Ignorance when Instruction may be
had, is a damnable Sin. And how furious an In- pag. 17.
consistency soever he would have it, to Pre-engage
Infants in Baptism to our Belief without their
Judgment, or for Others to be Sureties for them;
the Argument, if granted, destroys nothing but
the Expediency of that Sacrament, but proves little
against the thing. For the Privileges of that Ordi-
nance

Chap. I. nance are only conditional, and the Baptized Person when he comes to his Judgment, does either vacate or confirm his Obligation.

There is as little Reason in the following Conclusion he would draw, that Ignorance would upon this Hypothesis be more valuable than Knowledge, as putting us under an Obligation to a less Number of Duties. But as the Extent of our Knowledge does enlarge our Capacities to perform the Duties consequent upon it, the difficulties of a less Work may bear the same Proportion to shallower Capacities, as those of a larger do to such as are more extended. But however, were it otherwise, our great Master has promised to make our

2 Cor. 15. Reward answerable to our Work, and that none of our Labour shall be in vain in the Lord. And though Ignorance which is invincible joyned with a Practice answerable to such Knowledge as is obtained under one Dispensation, may stand a Man in equal stead with more Knowledge, and more Practice under another; yet to fly wilfully from Conviction and the evidences of Truth, when offered or attainable, either to Deserts among Brutes, whether our Author is inclinable to go, or to any other Refuge to escape the Light, and the Obligations arising from it, is indeed a method to avoid Knowledge, but not to get rid of Guilt; and the Man whose Judgment should determine him otherwise, would be answerable to God for the abuse of it.

As to the Objection, that the allowing the Authority of Private Judgment would put all Religions upon a level, and make the Gospel it self not obligatory: It follows only upon the general mistake of Private Judgment's having no Rule to which it ought to conform, which is not by me contended for. But however, I think it does unavoidably follow, as absurd as ever it is, from making

making *Publick Judgment* the *Rule of Private*; for Chap. I.
this obliges every particular Person in every particular Nation to conform to the *Publick Religion* of it, and that is certainly putting them all, if not in *themselves*, as to the *Private Persons* however, much upon the *level*; for the *Private Persons* are not to judge of the *Evidences* of the *several Religions* under such Obligations, but only of the *Determinations* of their own.

The common Distinction therefore for *both* is, that both *Publick* and *Private Judgment* are left at Liberty as to their *Choice* of every Religion, they are to judge the best they can of them all; and yet they are not under the *same*, or an *equal* Obligation to the *Belief* of them all. This can arise only from the *Evidences* of each, and accordingly as they are *duly* or *unduly* considered and weighed, accordingly is the Judgment and Determination *commendable* or *culpable* thereupon. So that though a Man may possibly through God's Mercy be saved by his sincerity in a *false Religion*, into the *Belief* of which he has been *ignorantly deluded*; it does not however follow, that he was not to *blame* for rejecting the *true* one, neither did his making *Choice* of the *One*, annul his *real Obligations* to the *Other*, and God alone to whom he is accountable, is to judge him for *Both*.

As to the odd Notion he has conceived of a *Future State of Bliss*, if Men of *all Religions* should meet in *Heaven*, and be rewarded for following the Dictates of their different *Private Judgments* upon *Earth*; I take even the opinion of the *Turks themselves*, how *extravagant* soever adjudged by him, that *some of every Sect shall meet and go to* pag. 24.
Heaven together under the Conduct of their proper *Leaders*, to be less ridiculous than *his own*, that it should be necessary for Men to be *alike* in *all Respects*, and agree in every particular *Sentiment* here,

Chap. I. here, in order to meet one another in Happiness hereafter. It may be sufficient, that they had an agreement with each other in *Sincerity*, and in the great *Lines* of *Religion*, though by reason of other Circumstances, and Obstacles insurmountable, they could not all arrive at the same apprehensions of every individual Truth: And the Compliment he makes the Devil upon this occasion, I cannot forbear taking notice of as very extraordinary; that upon the same Principle, that Men may be saved by acting with sincerity, and agreeably to their own Private Judgments, that

pag. 25. *infernal Spirit* may justly expect to be re-inflated in Happiness, since he fell from it only through *Spiritual Infirmity*, and the want of Knowledge, but not through any *Insincerity* or *Hypocrisy*, or any such *inexcusable Principle*: An *Apology* this the best, I believe, that was ever made for him; but 'tis so void of Truth, that no one sure but the Father of Lies will thank him for it. But as to the strength of the Argument it self, it can conclude nothing against us, unless the *Private Judgments* of Men could not be perverted by some or other *vitious Motives*, or a culpable *Negligence*, which may be justly punishable with the forfeiture of Happiness.

The Answer to what is next objected, that all

pag. 26. *Distinction between Good and Evil* is taken away by this Hypothesis, has been too often mentioned to be repeated; and the very Choice which Private Judgment makes of a *Religion*, supposes it to be no Rule it self, nor the *Standard of Truth*, but only the Director of what is apprehended to be so, in the application of which Men are many times mistaken, and sometimes very shamefully so, as in

pag. 27. the case of *Atheism*, which has no tolerably rational Foundation to support it, though it be produced by our Author in his following Objection, as making a very good Plea for it self upon the

Claims

Claims of Private Judgment ; but this can ne- Chap. I.
 ver protect it against those necessary and palpa-
 ble Obligations, which Men in all Circumstances
 lie under to believe otherwise. But how comes
 our Author not to perceive how much *stronger*
this Objection of the distinction between Good and Evil
being taken away, follows from his own Supposition,
 that *Publick Judgment* must determine what is
 such, than by leaving Private Persons to their
 own Conceptions about it? *Private Judgment*
 may indeed *mistake* the one for the other, but
 that does not destroy the *Distinction* between
 them ; but granting *Publick Judgment* the Autho-
 rity he pleads for, it effectually takes away their
 essential Difference, and the *Stamp of Authority*,
 supplies the place of the *Nature of Things*.

The *last Absurdity* our Author infers from the
 power of Private Judgment is, *the Destruction of* pag. 30.
it self, and the End it aims at ; and if it does so,
 I am content to let it *suffer*, but it cannot be
 much from *this Argument*, for there can be no
Church Tyranny over those whose Private Judg-
 ments give their *consent* to it. There may be
 the *Prejudices of Education* which may involve
 Men in *Error*, and if not shaken off, perhaps in
Misery ; but this does only *bypass*, not *destroy* the
Liberty of Judging.

Thus I have run through all the *dangerous and* pag. 30.
absurd Consequences which this Author has dedu-
 ced in this Chapter, from what he *mistakes* to be
 the *claim of Private Judgment*, or that *absolute Pow-*
er of it, which neither He nor I are willing to give
 it. But there is not so much as *one* of them can
 follow from its *just and real Authority*, which it
 ought by no means to be divested of, and which
 our Author proposes more accurately to handle
 as to its *Limits and Extent* in his *second Chapter* ;
 and therefore, I the more willingly proceed to
 examine

Chap. I. *examine it.* For notwithstanding our Disagree-
 ment in the way hitherto, I am not against joyn-
 ing with his Conclusion in the end, *that Private*
 pag. 31. *Judgment is not the sole Rule in matters of Religion.*
 But I take the Liberty to leave out the word
Guide, which he makes *Synonymous* with *Rule*;
 because I apprehend, that the *Rule* of Men's Acti-
 ons is *one thing*, and the *Guide* of them *another*.
 And our Author leaps a little too far at once,
 by proceeding in his second Chapter from a Sup-
 position, that he had already proved *Private*
Judgment neither the *sole Rule*, nor *Guide* in Reli-
 gion, when actually he has proved but *one*, and
 that too which did *less*, or *not at all*, want his
 Demonstrations. And therefore I must still *deny*
 his *Affertion*, which has not yet in the least been
 made out, *viz. That no Man is to Judge for him-*
 self, *what he is to Believe and Practice.*

C H A P. II.

pag. 33. **I**T is with some Satisfaction that I find our
 Author, in the Entrance of his second Chap-
 ter, acknowledging *Private Judgment* to be in
some Sense a Rule, and in *some Sense a Guide*; since
 all the Preachers of Religion make appeals to the
 Judgments and Consciences of Men, which it
 would be Nonsense to do, if they had not some
 sort of Judgment allowed them. And his
 Thoughts concerning *Education* in general, whe-
 ther it be in favour of *Truth* or *Error*, I do not
 much disapprove, but must acknowledge it a
 great *Byass* upon *Private Judgment*, and may be
 called *Prejudice* when it leads us contrary to
Truth; and 'tis generally very hardly shaken
 off, and sometimes it proves too strong for
Truth, and by being put into Possession of the
 Judgment,

Judgment, keeps it, notwithstanding all the Chap. II.
 force that better Reason and Argument produce
 to the contrary. But still 'tis *Private Judgment*
 that guides and governs the Man, and he does
 not follow the *Rule* of his *Education*, because 'tis
 his *Education*, but because he *misapprehends* it to
 be *Right*. Till the Judgment comes to exert it
 self, and to be in a capacity of performing its
 proper Office, there is no such thing as *Self-Gov-*
ernment, or the Application of *any Rule* to our
 Actions: We are in the power of *Others*, and so
 not answerable for them, no more than an *Idiot*
 or *Mad-man* would be who has not Sense to direct
 him. So that *Education* is a *Rule* that is given
 and proposed to us by *Others*, who judge this or
 that Belief and Practice best for us to be go-
 verned by: But 'tis an Act of our own *Judgment*
 that accepts it as such, and causes us to follow
 it. And though we should be *mistaken* in the
 choice we make, yet still 'tis our *Judgment*, and
 we must be governed by that application of our
 Rule, though it be a *false One*, till by some *grea-*
ter strength of Reason and *Light* we discover a *bet-*
ter, and become sensible of our Error.

And for this reason a *Pagan* who has been
 brought up in the Darkneſs of Heatheniſm; and
 never heard of the Gospel Revelation, does for
 want of greater Light make Choice of the Rules
 that have been taught him, and he muſt continue
 to practice them, till either better Reason, or clearer
 Revelation, inſtruct him otherwiſe. But what our
 Author means by a *Pagan's* turning *Chriſtian* upon
Principles purely Pagan, I cannot underſtand; if
 he means that Reason or the Conviction of *Judg-*
ment is a *Pagan Principle*, he is under a *miſtake*;
 for Reason is a Principle of *Humanity*, and that is
 common to *Chriſtianity*, as well as to *Paganism*; or
 how a *Pagan* can become a *Chriſtian* at the *firſt*
hearing

Chap. II. *hearing of the Name*, without apprehending either the meaning of it, or the Foundation upon which it is grounded, I do not well conceive; the reason why such a one must continue a *Pagan*, till he has heard of and understands Christianity, is very plain, because as yet he knows no better Religion; But when he does, and has been instructed in the Truths of Christianity, his own Judgment, and his Reason, how *Pagan* soever, obliges him to forsake the *One*, and embrace the *Other*; and thus 'tis manifestly his own Private Judgment that directs and determines him in Both.

pag. 37.

But says our Author, If Private Judgment were to proceed wholly upon Private Reasons in the Choice of a Rule, it might plead Pleasure, Profit, Honour, &c. as Private Reasons for such a Choice. This is the first time I ever heard those Considerations called Reasons, and I can entertain but a very mean Opinion of such Private Judgments as think them so: And therefore, though Men's Actions may be much influenced by such Motives, and that many times even contrary to their own Judgments, yet these are but mean sorts of Reason in Religious Matters to ground them upon, and cannot at all justify them when they do.

But waving all these Foreign Disputes about the Preference of one Rule to another, I will accompany our Author to the main Point in debate, and will take it for granted with him, that Private Judgment ought to be regulated by some Standard or Rule, and that Christianity, or the Truths of the Gospel are this Rule: And we are now to consider distinctly the Bounds and Limits of its Authority, in which I joyn with him in all the particulars he allows it, but am of the direct contrary Opinion in every Instance he restrains it; I will take some notice even of the particulars we agree in.

And

Chap. II. their Salvation certainly depends upon; what monstrous Inconvenience is it, if they use the same Liberty in matters of Speculation? I would he had given some better answer, that I might have had an occasion to have enforced this matter. For in truth it seems to me a very strange thing, when I read in the *New Testament* such terrible Denunciations against the practice of Sin, and that Mens Happiness or Misery depends so much on their doing Good or Evil; and so very little said as to Mens Errors or Mistakes of Judgment, (where there is a general sincerity as to a good Life, and a care to please God;) that so much weight should be laid on an infallible Judge in matters of Controversy, and no care taken for an infallible Guide in matters of Practice.

But I am to consider, that it tends more to the Interest of some People to swagger about an infallible Faith, than to secure the practice of Virtue and a good Life, which yet is certainly the great design and concernment of the Christian Religion, however it may seem to some, that an infallible Faith and Church are all in all.

pag. 39. The next particular Province our Author assigns to the Authority of *Private Judgment*, is, the Application of the *Christian Rule* to our Practice: If he had said *Belief* too, I should think it a fair Concession, and comprehensive enough to take in its whole Jurisdiction; for 'tis already supposed, that it has made choice of its Rule, and that rightly too, the *Christian one*, otherwise indeed there could be no room for its Application, and I cannot see what it need further Claim than the liberty of applying it both as to what is to be Believed, and what is to be Practised, both which are comprehended in its Rule. And this our Author in his next obscure Paragraph seems

seems to grant it, by mentioning a *speculative* Chap. 12 Application as to Articles of *Faith*, as well as a *practical* One, as to the Regulation of *Manners*. pag. 39.

If *this* be the meaning of our Author's Concession, which I will not too positively build upon, unless it had been more clearly expressed, it *destroys* at once all his following *Limitations*. That *Private Judgment* can neither *abuse its own Church*, pag. 55. nor *explain Scripture*, nor *supersede the Decrees of the Church*. But if it has taken *Christianity* for its *Rule*, which we have supposed, how can it *apply this Rule* without judging what particular Church is *most conformable* to the *Laws of the Gospel*, the original Pattern and Model of all, and so choosing to be of it? And how can it judge of the *Doctrines* of that Church, in bringing them to the Standard of *Scripture*, but by first putting some *Sense* upon those places with which it compares them? And how can it but *reject* such Church *Decrees* as are plainly *inconsistent* with them? And all this I think very justly from the *Concession* that is granted it, of *applying the Rule of Christianity*, which our Author seems to acknowledge is the *Scripture*, to it self.

The last Branch of the power of *Private Judgment*, which our Author is willing to grant it is, the *correcting and superseeding of Human Laws*, which pag. 39. indeed in many places that affect the *Conscience* it is obliged to do: But it seems a little strange, that it should be allowed a *Jurisdiction* *superiour* to *Human Laws* in points of *Government*, where there is an *ultimate Judgment* assigned, and no *Appeals* from it; and that it should be denied the *Privileges and Authority* of a *Guide* in matters of *Religion* and points of *Faith*, of which there is no *magisterial Judge* appointed; and which therefore must be left to the *Cognizance of God alone*, who in a future State will take an Account of

Chap. II. what use we have made of all our Faculties both of *Body* and *Mind*, and reward or punish us accordingly.

After these general Grants which our Author will allow to the Jurisdiction of Private Judgment, he closes the whole with three short *Directions*, to guide it in its Operations, and to make it sensible when it acts *within* or *out* of its Province.

pag. 40. The first is in matters which we are sure are in themselves *indifferent*, concerning which methinks 'tis not very material whether we judge or no. And he is very much mistaken when he
pag. 41. says, that these things have created more *Strife* and *Contention* in the *Christian World*, than any one *Article of Faith* that ever was debated; for 'tis plain, that the Persons on both sides the question could not be of this Opinion, for had the things been thought so *indifferent* by both, there would have been no *Dispute* between them. But the *Strife* and *Contention* that has arisen upon this occasion, has been about the Nature of what things are *indifferent*, and what *not*; and to prevent the imposition of things that are *not* under the Colour as though they were: And such an Enquiry may be of that Importance as to call for a *serious Debate*, and was once a Subject thought worthy of the Consultation of the *Apostles themselves*; the result
Acts 5. 6, of which was, *Not to put a Yoke upon the Neck of*
10. *the Disciples, which neither their Fathers, nor themselves were able to bear*, meaning it of *Circumcision*,
Gal. 6. 5. which was a thing then *indifferent*, and availed nothing.

pag. 40. His second Rule is of more importance, and gives leave to private Judgment to determine such things for which we are only accountable to God; which I conceive takes in most of the inward Principles of Religion, and Mens private Thoughts and

and Conceptions of God and his Providence. Chap. II.

For as to those *Professions of Faith* which the *Publick* may require from us, they seem to be only such *Declarations* as are necessary for the *Church's* *Information*, that we have a *Right* to the *Privileges* and *Benefits* of those *outward Ordinances* in *Religion*, which the *Author* of it has *instituted*, and given the *Church* a power of *administring* to every *Member* of it : But though the *Church* be entrusted with *this Authority*, she is not either *Unaccountable* or *Infallible* as to the *exercise* of it ; the *Publick* is indeed to judge and settle what *Articles of Belief* and *Terms of Communion* it thinks reasonable to require of all its *Members*, and yet every *particular Person* must judge likewise of the *Truth* of those *Articles*, and of the *lawfulness* of those *Terms* before he complies with them.

The third and last Direction he gives for the conduct of *Private Judgment* is, to keep to things *pag. 40.* depending upon the *variableness* of our *Lives* and *Fortunes*, which is truly one part of its proper Province, as it concerns the *moral* part of our *Duty*; which from various *Circumstances* may require a different *Conduct*, of which *Private Judgment alone* can be the *Director*, as being the most proper Judge of our *Condition* in every *respective State*.

I now come to the *three great Limitations* which our *Author* has fixed upon *Private Judgment*, and the *Reasons* upon which he establishes them : In these I think his *main Errors* consist, and therefore I shall the more particularly examine them. And First,

I. *Private Judgment*, he says, cannot, he means only ought not, by its own *Authority* to determine *apag. 41.* *Man* in the *Choice* of his *Religion*; or in other *Terms*, that no *Man* is to judge for himself, and by his own *Reason* only, *what Church* he will be of.

Now

Chap. II. Now this, I must say, upon the bare reading of it, appears a very *shocking Proposition*, but because some things that sound *Paradoxical* may in a particular Sense be *true*; I will not be discouraged from considering the *strength* of those *Reasons* he grounds it upon. The first is,

1. That *Private Men*, all of them at least, are not *qualified* for such a *Judgment*, for want of being acquainted with, and thoroughly understanding *all the Evidences* of every *Religion*, which he supposes necessary for it. Now granting it to be so, that some *Private Men* are not capable of judging of *all the Points* in every *Religion*, or of some particular *Parts* of their own; does it follow from hence, that therefore they must not judge for themselves at all, either as to the Truth of such Religions as they do know the Evidences of, or in such particulars of their Duty as they can understand? Or how would the *Church's* judging for them better their Knowledge in this respect? But *great Learning* is not essential to a *good Christian*, and a *Man* may judge right of some Truths without having an actual Knowledge of all.

However, I must observe here, that this Argument does not wholly destroy the *thing it self*, the Authority of *Private Judgment*, but does only *limit* the *exercise* of it to such Persons alone who have a competent Knowledge and sufficient Abilities to form a rational Judgment; for that some *Private Men* may be thus qualified, I presume is not to be questioned. And as for such Persons whose knowledge may be *less Extensive*, and not so well able to make laborious Searches, and learned Inquiries after Truth, and so unfit to be made *Governments* in Religion, or Teachers and Instructors of Others: Yet sure they may generally have understanding enough to comprehend

send plain and evident Truths when discovered Chap. II.
to them, and laid before them, and so let their
Judgments yield to *reasonable Conviction*, and
make their *Practice* conformable to what they *do*
know; and such common understandings will
seldom fail to discover, when they are guided
by sincerity, what is grossly erroneous in Religion,
and God's Mercy will make allowances for their
lesser failings, and their more innocent, because
not wilful Mistakes. But to this it is replied in
the second place.

2. *That the want of one Article spoils the Chri-* pag. 42.
stian, if it be a fundamental One. Possibly our
Author may think more Articles *fundamental Ones*
than really there are, as the *Pope's Supremacy* and
Infallibility we know in some Countries are decla-
red to be so: And yet I conceive, the want of
Faith to believe such Articles, will never endan-
ger the *Salvation* of any good Christian; neither
can it be necessary, that all Christians should
have the same *Extent of Knowledge*, unless God
had given them all the same Capacities, and the
same Opportunities of improving them. And
the Scripture tells us, *that unto whomsoever much is* Luk. 12:
given, of him shall be much required: So that such 48.

Truths as may be *sufficient* for one Man to know
in Religion, may be *less Knowledge* than God may
accept of in another, who is in a Capacity to un-
derstand more. And though all Believers must
agree in their *first Principle*, and build upon the
same Foundation, the acknowledgment of our
Saviour Jesus Christ, as sent from God for the
Salvation of Mankind; yet every one is to improve
this Knowledge in himself, as to the further *Par-*
ticulars it comprehends in it, according as his own
Reason, and the Light of Scripture, and the op-
portunities he has of cultivating the One, and
studying the Other, will permit. And this of
course

Chap. II. course must be in *different Degrees*, because Mens *Talents* and *Circumstances* are *different*.

It is not therefore necessary for Men to agree in the *Extent* of their Knowledge, or in the *very same Conceptions* of very material Truths of Christianity; nay, it is not absolutely necessary in order to joyn in this or that *particular Church*; that every ones Thoughts should be just the *same* as to every individual Article of it. To instance in *one Article* of the *Apostles Creed*, which all Christians acknowledge to be true, and which our Author will say is a necessary part of Christianity, *that Jesus Christ descended into Hell*. Now suppose *three sincere Persons* entertain different Conceptions of this Article, one understanding the Word *Hell* for that place of Torment where the Devil and his Angels are confined, another taking it to signify the *Receptacle of departed Souls*, and a third looking upon it only as another Expression for the *Grave*; I would ask our Author whether he would exclude any *two* of these Persons, since they cannot *all three* be in the *Right*, from the common Name and Privileges of Christians, or even from the Communion, or Membership of the *Church of England*? I should think that notwithstanding their disagreement of Judgment in *this particular*, they would *all* have a just Claim to the Benefits and Advantages of *both*; but however, that their misunderstanding this one Article, would *not quite spoil the Christian*, as our Author imagines.

pag. 43.

3. A third Reason this Writer brings to establish his first Proposition upon, is, that an ordinary *illiterate Christian* would be obliged to give up his Faith to a *learned Heathen*, if his own Judgment must guide him in his Religion; I hope this does by no means follow, it cannot indeed unless there were more Reason for *Heathenism* than there

is for *Christianity*, which I cannot yet allow of; Chap. II. and sure no Christian of any tolerable Discretion would so easily part with his *Faith* and *Hope* as to quit both, upon the first hearing of every *sophistical Argument* that is urged against them: Methinks *common Sense* may direct him to call in the assistance of his *Spiritual Guide*, and to consult his better Judgment, and oppose the others with it, and so hearken to *both sides* before he finally determines himself: But I observe, that as at first our Author represents *Private Judgment* as wholly *unqualified* for this Office of a Judge, so here in this Argument he will needs have it a very *partial One*, and make it give Judgment without examining the *Merits of the Cause*, and without hearing on *both sides* what the proper Advocates may have to defend it; and whatever Courts of Judicature proceed at *this Rate*, must be equally subject to *Error*. But private Judgment is not obliged to this Proceedure, and consequently may find *greater Reason* to adhere to the plain Truths of the Gospel, by consulting those who are better able to defend it, and from the clear Evidence of undoubted matters of Fact, than what any *learned Heathen* can produce to persuade to the contrary.

And does not Ecclesiastical History inform us, that many plain *ordinary Christians*, merely by the strength of Truth, and the Evidence of well-attested Facts, proved *too hard* in Dispute for the most subtle and acutest *Philosophers* in the first Ages of Christianity, and instead of being forced to yield up their Faith to them, convinced them of their *learned Errors*, and brought them over to the belief of the Gospel Revelation; and the same Arms that prevailed to *establish Christianity*, I presume may be thought sufficient to *defend* it. But 'tis urged further in the next place,

Chap. II. 4. That the calling in to our Assistance the reason of others in our search after *Truth*, and in the determining our *Choice* of it, is not going by our own *Judgments*, but by *theirs* whose Information we receive; but how *this* can be produced with the face of an Argument, to limit Private Judgment in this part of its Province, by one who in the very same Paragraph acknowledges, *that to inform our Judgments, is not to destroy their Authority*, I cannot imagine: Or how it is consistent with our Author's own Notion of it expressed in another part of his Book, I must leave to himself to consider; where having spoken of the giving up our *Private Judgments* to the *Decisions* of the *Publick*, he adds, 'and to say, when we think with the Publick, our Thoughts are none of our own, is Nonsense. For by the very same Argument, when we borrow our Thoughts or any part of our Knowledge from Books, or from Conversation, these, though never so instructing and useful, may be called none of our own too, and by this Argument made perfectly useless and incapable of doing us any good.

pag. 44.

By whatever methods then Men acquire Knowledge is not material, it becomes their *own* when once attained, and 'tis an act of their *own Judgment* that assents to the Truth of this or that Religion, whosoever are the *Persons* that shew them the *Reasons* why they should do so, and are the means or instruments of their Conviction; and 'tis so far from being culpable to seek to others for Information in this matter, upon this Principle, that 'tis manifestly the *Duty* of every Private Judgment to do so, and not rashly determine without it.

5. Our Author's fifth Reason concerning the settlement of the Church at first by *Miracles*, and the *Authority* it was invested with thereupon, is foreign

pag. 44.

foreign to the question, and does more properly Chap. II. belong to his third Limitation about the *Decrees* of the Church, where it will receive its answer with the rest; only I will observe at present, that the *Miracles* by which God at first established the Church, were an *appeal* to *Private Judgment*, without the Conviction of which there could have been no *Establishment*, and when there *was*, it could not be with a design wholly to *destroy* it.

6. As to what is said, That if every Man were to direct himself in the choice of his own Church, *pag. 44.* then *no more* of that Church could be said to be *his*, than what he *comprehended*: I see no ill-consequence would follow in granting it to be true, since though he does not comprehend the *whole Extent* of all its Doctrines, and every particular Branch of every Article the Church acknowledges, yet he may understand *sufficient* to make him a *Member* of it; and to say, as our Author does, that there is not one Church in Christendom has any one Member that thoroughly understands it, is to say, that there is no Church in Christendom understands it self, and its own *Establishments*. And so if neither *Publick* nor *Private Judgment* be sufficient to form an *entire Church*, we are left but in a bad State as to Religion, and must entertain none it seems for want of comprehending it *all*; which indeed is made a *direct inference* from his next following Reason, *page 45.* But this Censure falls equally on *both sides* our dispute, and when our Author undertakes to make good the defect on the *one side*, I promise him to answer for the *other*.

7. But 'tis said further, *the Church is a Society, pag. 45.* and Private Men cannot join with it without *implicit Faith*, unless they *know all its Laws and Orders*, and unless they *approve* of them, they must not *conform*, and if Men are to chuse their Society, both these Evils may *happen*; but both, how

Chap. II. easily soever they may happen, may be avoided notwithstanding. For the *Laws* and *Orders* of the Church are not so hard to be known, but a *Private Capacity* may arrive at the knowledge of them; and that our *Author himself* thinks so, I will venture to prove from his own *Words* in this following Paragraph, page 150. ' In the mean time, ' all the *Doctrines*, *Articles*, *Canons*, and *Discipline* of our Church, in short, *all things* that are ' required as *Terms of Communion*, are fully and ' freely communicated and published; nothing ' is kept in reserve, but every the *meanest Member* ' sees, and reads, and may consider what he is ' to believe, to acknowledge, and to practice, in ' order to joyn himself to the *Church of England*; ' he has all and every part of the *Terms* opened ' and explained to him, so that he cannot without *difficulty mistake* them. The reasonableness of every Article, the Conformity between ' the *Doctrines* and the *Scriptures*, and between ' the *Discipline* of ours, and the *Primitive Church* ' are so fully made out, that every *Private Judge* ' takes nothing implicitly, but becomes a *Member* of ' the *Church of England*, with his Eyes broad open, ' and knows exactly what is required of him, when ' he makes that Choice.

From hence, I hope, I may conclude, one in a *Private Capacity* may know the *Laws* and *Orders* of a Church, and thereby avoid *implicit Faith* in embracing its Communion; and I presume it not unreasonable to imagine a *Private Judgment* may be so wisely directed as to conform to them, upon a just *Approbation* of them; and what then becomes of this *Objection* our Author brings here to the contrary? Or how does it prove, that *Men must not choose their own Church*? Its being a *Society* leaves room for a *voluntary Subscription*, and if its *Terms of Communion* are not sinful, for a ready and

and a willing *Conformity*; but if they appear *Chap. II.*
otherwise, and Men's own *Judgments* must be con-
 sulted in that, each Man has Authority to *reject*
 them, and this may be done without running
 the Hazard of being, or of making it his *Duty* to
 be of *no Church*, and of *no Religion at all*. But sup-
 posing Men in a *Private Capacity* not able to *know*
 the *Laws* and *Orders* of the Church, there seems
 to be a *difficulty* which our *Author* must account
 for, how they can be obliged or brought to *obey*
 them.

8. What is affirmed in the next place of *Mora. pag. 45*
lity, as being but a *temporal System*, and as having
no Title to a *future Reward*, I take to be *false in*
Fact, as well as the *Argument* grounded upon it ;
 for our obligation to the *moral part* of our *Duty*,
 is not of a *Temporal*, but *eternal Nature*, and can-
 not cease to affect us so long as our *Nature* is what
 it is. And as to the *Reward* of it in a *future State*,
 'tis what the *Heathens* themselves had *Expectations*
 of, and what their natural *Apprehensions*
 might, though obscurely, dictate to them, even
 before revealed Religion declared there should be
 such, and *Life and Immortality were brought to light* 2 Tim. 1:
by the Gospel. Now 'tis true, both our *Mortality* 10.
 and our *Religion* have a *Rule* to direct them, and
 the same Authority that imposed the one, obliges
 to the other ; and what *Absurdity* is it to say a
 Man may chuse his *Morals*, as well as his *Religi-*
on, if it be meant only of the making use of his
own Judgment in the application of the *Rule* of
both to himself? which is *all the Authority* that
Private Judgment does contend for, and yet
 professes it self *accountable* in the *Use* of it. This
 is what I apprehended our *Author* did grant it
 towards the beginning of this Chapter, where he
 says, *That as to the moral part of Christianity, Pri. pag. 37*
Private Judgment is of great Power and Authority: But

now

Chap. II. now it seems it is as much *Nonsense* to say we must regulate our *Morals* by it, as our *Faith*.

pag. 45.

9. It is urged further, *That the Publick may call any one to an Account for his Faith*; but this there would be no occasion to do, if the *Publick* were to judge for him, and therefore is an Argument of the contrary, that every one must judge for himself, notwithstanding his being responsible for his Judgment to another. The Account the *Publick* requires from its *Members*, is no more than an open Declaration of their assent to the plain Truths of the Gospel, as the condition on their part to be acknowledged to entitle them to the benefit of the *Publick Ordinances* of it: And this the *Church* has a right to do, and to examine, and judge of Mens Qualifications for them, in order to administer them to them, and upon finding a just Cause, to exclude them. But how does the allowing *Publick Judgment* to settle its own Terms of Communion, divest *Private Judgment* of its right to examine them, in order to its Assent or Dissent to them? The *Publick Judgment* has no binding *Authoritative Power* over *Private*, so as to oblige it to concur in all its Determinations. The *Church* her self is bound by *Scripture*, which is the Rule of *Faith*, and has no power to obtrude this or that Decision of her own as an Article of *Faith*, which is not contained in it, upon the belief of any of her *Members*; this exceeds that just and reasonable Authority, the Authority of Order she is acknowledged to be intrusted with, and is what no *Private Judgment* is obliged to submit to, but is a manifest *Usurpation* upon Almighty God's Prerogative, and answers that part of the Description of Anti-Christ, given by St. Paul, of his sitting as God, in the Temple of God, shewing himself that he is God.

Bishop of
Sarum's
Exposition,
Art. 20.

2 Thess. 2.
4

10. The last Argument to invalidate the Au- Chap. II.
thority of *Private Judgment* as to its making
Choice of its *Religion*, is, that it would make all
Religions Elective, and so put them all upon a *Level*, pag. 45;
and make *Paganism* as true or truer than *Christia-*
nity, if by any it be made *Choice* of before it.
But this Error has been too often already obser-
ved, to need any further Confutation, that *Mens*
Opinions of things alter not the *Nature* of them,
that a Religion is not either truer or falser in it
self, upon the Account of the bare *Choice* that is
made of it; and all the Evil that can follow from
hence is, that 'tis possible a *sincere Man* may be
mistaken, and embrace *Falshood* instead of *Truth*.

But I must again remind our Author, that *this*
Objection has its force against the Authority of
Publick Judgment, if *that* and not the *Nature* of
things be to regulate *Private*; for many *false Reli-*
gions have *Publick Judgment* to establish them,
so that, if by *that Standard* all *Truth* were to be
judged, *Paganism* would indeed be as true as
Christianity, all *Religions Elective*, and all upon
a *Level*.

I think therefore upon the whole, that none of
our Author's *Reasons* appear strong enough to sup-
port the *first Limitation* he would assign to the
Authority of *Private Judgment*, viz. *That no Man*
is to judge for himself what Church he will be of.
Let us see now whether he succeeds any better as
to his *Second*.

II. That *Private Judgment* cannot in *Virtue* of its
own Authority interpret *Scripture*. The *Reasons* he
gives for it are these.

1. He triumphs in the first place with an ap-
pearance of having the *Scriptures themselves* on his
side, by quoting some *Words* out of them, whose
Sound led him to think them applicable to the
point in hand, though the *Sense* of them be quite
foreign

Chap. II. foreign to his purpose, 'tis that place in St. Peter;

pag. 46.

2 Pet. 1. 20. where the Apostle says, *that no Prophecy of the Scripture, is of any Private Interpretation*; which Words relate only to the Authority of the Divine Inspiration of the Old Testament, which Prophetick Writings the Apostle affirms did not proceed from the Incitation, Motion, or Suggestion of the Prophets own Private Spirits, but

Whitby's
Annot.

from the Inspiration of the Holy Ghost; which Sense of the place our Author might very easily have discovered, had he but cast his Eye upon the following Verse, which is Explanatory of the former, *For the Prophecy came not in old time by the Will of Man, but holy Men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.* But he runs away with

Ver. 21.

the sound of the Words *Private Interpretation*, just after the same manner as the Roman Catholicks do with this Expression, *this is my Body*, and from thence absurdly argues, that if the Scripture is true, what he says of Private Judgment must be so too; as if there were any Connexion between asserting the Scriptures to be of Divine Authority, and from thence concluding, that Men must not use their own Judgments in understanding them.

Matt. 26.
26.

pag. 47.

It is further urged, *That a power in Private Judgments to explain and interpret Scripture, would be the same thing as a power to make Scripture*; I think the best way to answer this Objection is to ask the Author of it this short Question; Whether the Church, for whose Authoritative Power in the Interpretation of Scripture he so earnestly contends, can make Scripture? If he answers in the Affirmative, he pleads for a power which the most absolute and tyrannical Church upon Earth, even that of Rome, never yet claimed; for I never heard that the Pope himself could make Scripture. If he grants the Negative, I presume he will perceive the Weakness of his Objection, which runs as strong against

against *Publick*, as *Private Judgment*, if either of Chap. II. them had an Authoritative Compulsive Power of obliging and commanding the Assent of the Other: And indeed it is often produced, and I think with reason enough, to invalidate this imperious Claim in the *first*, and may be turned upon our Author by just changing the Terms in his own Words, thus:

‘ A power in the *Church* authoritatively to explain and interpret *Scripture*, would be the same thing as a power to make *Scripture*; which power cannot belong to the *Church*, because she has a Rule given her to go by, and cannot therefore make or create that Rule. But now if the *Church* were so to explain *Scripture*, this must be the same thing as a power to make *Scripture*; because *Scripture* may be so interpreted as to signify quite otherwise than the *Author of Scripture* intended, which plainly implies a power equal to that of the *Author of Scripture*; and this must give the *Church* the power of *Revelation*, which is an intolerable Absurdity.

3. As to what is said, that *Private Judgment* pag. 47. has not a power to make *Doctrines*, which carry a 43. publick and general Obligation, I never heard that *Private Judgment* did pretend to it; but how does it follow from hence, that because it does not make *Doctrines* for others, it must not therefore determine for it self? This is all the Jurisdiction it pretends to, to judge only what it self is obliged to believe, but not to impose its Conclusions upon others; tho’ the same Evidence which convinces one *Private Judgment*, may carry with it an Obligation for the Conviction of another, and so it may become obligatory upon all to whom the same Evidence is offered; but then this does not arise from the Authority of one Man’s *Judgment* over another’s, but from the Nature of *Truth*, and the Obligation which the clear Evidences of it lay upon Mens *Judgments* for their Conviction.

4. But ’tis urged, that the *Church* is a Society,
F and

Chap. II. and cannot subsist as such without a Rule, which is
 pag. 48. made from Scripture into Articles and Terms, which
 are binding upon its several Members, which is incon-
 sistent with Mens interpreting Scripture for themselves.
 This has been already in some measure considered,
 and it needs only be observed here, that the
 Seventh Obj. to first Church's being a Society is very well consistent with
 Limit. the exercise of Private Judgment in the understand-
 ing of Scripture, and with every Mans voluntary
 Choice of what Church or Society he will unite
 with, which must be that whose Articles and
 Terms, or whose Doctrines and Worship he thinks
 most agreeable to Scripture. And tho' this Society
 may be denied to have Authority to oblige its
 Members to submit their Judgments in matters of
 Faith, which must be regulated by another Rule:
 Yet there is an Obligation upon the Members of
 such a Society to submit themselves as to what con-
 cerns Order and Discipline, and the due Government
 of the said Society, which is all that is Essential to
 it as such.

5. The next Objection against Private Judgment
 pag. 48. being admitted to interpret Scripture, is, that it
 would put the Alcoran and Gospel, and all Religions
 Tenth Obj. on a Level. But this is what has been before obje-
 to first cted, and already answered, and is what does by no
 Limit. means follow, unless each Religion had the same
 Evidences of Truth on its side, and God had equally
 established them all, which is a contradiction to
 imagine; and consequently a Man's Choice of a
 false Religion cannot render it the true one, neither
 is his mistake always justifiable before God, or God
 obliged hereafter to Reward it. But how far a Man's
 sincerity may avail with God to pardon his Errors,
 is another question, and not our business at present
 to determine.

But since our Author is so fond of repeating this
 Objection, the Reader I hope will pardon the
 trouble I am forced to give him in the so frequent
 Repetition of the same Observation in answer to
 it;

it; that a power in the Publick to make its own Chap. II.
Interpretations of Scripture binding upon its Mem-
 bers, does really include in it that absurdity of put-
 ting all Religions upon a Level, which our Author
 without any just Reason would fix upon the claim
 of Private Persons having a right to judge for them-
 selves; for if the Publick Determinations must take
 place, be valid and true, then there can be no room
 to make any difference between the pure Word of
 God, and Pagan and Popish Lies, that is, between
 Divine Revelation and Human Invention; for accor-
 ding to this principle, 'tis not the Truth of this or
 that Interpretation of Scripture that must deter-
 mine our Judgments, but the Authority of this or
 that Publick Decision concerning it, upon which
 bottom the Alcoran stands as firmly established as
 the Gospel, which I hope this Writer does not de-
 signedly contend for, how necessary a consequence
 soever it be from the principle he lays down.

6. What our Author offers in his following Pa-
 ragraph, concerning the ridiculousness of a Man's pag. 49
explaining Scripture for himself, and to make himself
Wiser, is a meer Quibble which he is pleased to di-
 vert himself withal; but I have no mind to dis-
 pute about Words, and therefore, if he will not
 allow a Man either to interpret or explain Scripture
 for himself, it shall please me full as well, if he
 will but give him leave to understand it.

7. But 'tis further urged, that all Scripture being pag. 50.
of Divine Authority, ought to be explained by the Au-
thority which approaches nearest to Divine. This I
 may venture to grant without any damage to the
 Cause; for next to Revelation, which is confessedly
 of Divine Authority, is the Authority of Right Rea-
 son, if it may not in one Sense be accounted Divine
 too, as being acknowledged by Scripture it self to
 be the Candle of the Lord. Now a Man that has Prov. 20.
 this on his side in understanding the several parts of 27.
 Revelation, has certainly greater Authority to deter-
 mine his Judgment accordingly, even though he

Chap. II. be left to himself, than the contrary persuasion of a *Multitude*; whom in many Cases *single Persons* are by *Divine Authority* commanded to oppose, *Exod.* 23. 2. *Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do Evil, neither shalt thou speak in a Cause, to declare after many, to wrest Judgment.* To argue therefore for *Divine Authority*, barely from the extent of *Dominion* or *Jurisdiction*, as our Author does, is in other Words to establish *Truth* by the number of *Voices*, and that is to destroy it; for *Christianity* itself, which is undoubtedly true, must in this Case give way to *Paganism* and *Mahometism*, which is as evidently false.

pag. 50. 8. It is said in the last place by our Author, that *Holy Scripture* was designed to enlighten *Private Judgment*, and to be a *Rule* to it; and this is very true, and what he is pleased now to grant further, that the *Application* of this *Rule* belongs to *Private Judgment*. Very well! But what then? why then, to suppose that *Private Judgment* can alter or supersede this *Rule*; but how comes our Author to suppose, that ever any Man could make such a *Supposition*, as to pretend an *Authority* to alter a *Rule* given him by his *Maker*? But this, says he, in many Cases it must do, if it has a *Power* to explain it; but where, I beseech him to shew, is the *Necessity* of this? And if there be, how will the *Church* her self avoid the *Evil*, if whoever has a *Right* to explain *Scripture* must alter it, and that in many Cases? Now if this *supposition* fail him, his other that follows as built upon it, must sink likewise, that the *Rule* is hereby subjected to the thing ruled, and may be altered by it at *Discretion*, which is a very great *Absurdity*; but I must tell him 'tis only of his own making, and the result of false *Suppositions* he raises for himself, which being wide of *Truth*, leave most of his Arguments without a *Foundation*, and sink under that weighty Building he erects upon them; and 'tis an easy matter by taking one *Error* for granted, to make a thousand *Absurdities* follow it, which is our Author's plausible way of arguing. III.

III. There is *one further Limitation* yet assigned Chap. II: to *Private Judgment*, which remains still to be examined, and 'tis this: *That it cannot supersede, or annul the Decrees of the Church.*

It may not be amiss to present our Author in this place, before I proceed to consider his particular Arguments upon *this Point*, with the *Judgment* of a *Church of England Man* relating to this matter; which, I hope, may be of use to him, to rectify his *Mistakes* about the *Authority* of *Synods* and *Councils* in his *Eighth Chapter*, and to give him some *better Light* in the particulars advanced in *this*: I meet with it in a *Discourse concerning a Judge of Controversies in matters of Religion, in answer to some Papers, asserting the necessity of such a Judge*, Printed Anno 1686. At the 10th Page of it, is this *Reply* to the *Plea* for a *standing Judge* in such matters; as for that passage, '*That the Guides of the Church in the best of times did not then think a Man safe, tho' he to the best of his understanding did expound Scripture, if he did not follow the Sense of the Church, it has something of Truth, but a great deal of Sophistry in it.*' It is so far true, that a Man who embraces damnable Errors is not safe, how firmly soever he be perswaded of the Truth of them, and that it is very hazardous to contradict the Sense, not of any *Council*, which may be a pack'd Conventicle of *Hereticks*, nor of any *particular Age* of the Church, which may be very ignorant, or very corrupt, but of the *Universal Church in all Places and Ages*. But in this Sense it is nothing to the present purpose, and if the meaning be, as it seems to be, that it is dangerous for a Man to use his own Reason and Judgment in opposition to the Decrees of Councils, it may sometimes be so, and sometimes not, as the Council is; and whatever the event be, every Man must judge of that: It may prove dangerous to a Man to use his Reason, if he do not use it Right; but yet there is no help for it, but every Man must use his Reason, or act like a Fool.

, ' But

Chap. II. ' But possibly it will be asked, What *Authority*
 ' then do we allow to *Councils* ? And I shall very
 ' freely speak my mind of it. *First*, In Cases that
 ' are doubtful, the Judgment of so many Wise and
 ' Learned and Pious Men from all parts of the
 ' Christian Church, is a very probable Argument
 ' of the Truth of their Decrees; and no modest
 ' Man will openly oppose what they determine,
 ' unless it appears that there was something of
 ' *Faction* and *Interest* at the bottom, or that the
 ' Reasons whereby they were over-ruled were so
 ' weak or ludicrous, as to render their Judgments
 ' contemptible; for if the Opinion of *one* learned
 ' Man be so considerable, much more is the deli-
 ' berate Judgment of *so many* great and good Men.
 ' *Secondly*, The Authority of ancient Councils is
 ' very considerable, as they were credible *Witnesses*
 ' of the Apostles Doctrine and Practice, and the
 ' constant Faith of the Church in the preceding
 ' Ages, which is a mighty Satisfaction to find by
 ' these venerable Records, that what we now be-
 ' lieve was the Faith of the Church in the best and
 ' purest Ages, before it was divided by *Schisms*
 ' and *Factions*, or corrupted with *Ease* or *Liberty*,
 ' or *wanton Disputes*. *Thirdly*, General or National
 ' Councils have Authority to determine *what Do-*
 ' *ctrines* shall be *publickly* professed and taught in
 ' their Churches, and be made the *Articles* of Church
 ' *Communion*, as it must necessarily be, if there be
 ' *any* Authority in the Church; for it is fit that the
 ' Faith of the Church should be *one*, and those who
 ' have the *Government* of the Church, must have the
 ' care of the *Faith*; but then this Authority does
 ' not oblige any Man to *Believe*, as the Church *Be-*
 ' *lieves*, and to receive all such *Decrees* without
 ' Examination; but only if we will live in *Com-*
 ' *munion* with such a Church, we must own the
 ' *Faith* of that Church, for she will allow none to
 ' communicate with her who *do not*. Now if the
 ' *Faith* and *Worship* of such a Church be *Pure* and
 ' *Orthodox*,

' *Orthodox*, the Church is in the right in requiring Chap. II.
 ' Obedience and Conformity to her Decrees and
 ' Constitutions, and those who refuse it, must an-
 ' swer it both to God and Man: If her Faith be
 ' corrupt, she abuses her power in imposing it on
 ' Christians, and no Man is bound to *believe* what
 ' is *false*, because the Church defines it to be *true* :
 ' If you ask whose Judgment ought to take place,
 ' the Judgment of the Church, or of every *Private*
 ' *Christian* ? I answer, the Judgment of the Church
 ' of necessity must take place as to *External Govern-*
 ' *ment*, to determine what shall be *professed* and
 ' *practised* in her *Communion*, and no *Private* *Chri-*
 ' *stian* has any thing to do in these matters : But
 ' when the question is, what is *right* or *wrong*, *true*
 ' or *false*, in what we may *obey*, and in what *not* ?
 ' Here every *Private Christian* who will not believe
 ' without understanding, nor follow his Guides
 ' blindfold, must judge for himself, and it is as much
 ' as his *Soul* is worth to judge right. For if he re-
 ' ject the *Faith* and the *Communion* of the Church
 ' without a *just* and *necessary Cause*, he is a *Heretick*
 ' and a *Schismatick*, liable to the *Censures* of the
 ' Church in this World, and to the *Vengeance* of God
 ' in the next. If he reject an *erroneous* and *corrupt*
 ' *Communion*, he incurs the *Censures* of the Church,
 ' which in most Christian Kingdoms are attended
 ' with some *Temporal Inconveniences* ; and if he em-
 ' brace it, he is in danger of a future Judgment ; for
 ' if the *Blind* lead the *Blind*, they shall both fall into
 ' the *Ditch*. These are the proper *Limits* of all *Hu-*
 ' *man Authority*, both in Church and State, below
 ' this there is no *Authority*, and above it, it is not
 ' *Human Authority*, for a blind Obedience can be
 ' due to none but God, and he himself seldom exacts
 ' it. If we will grant Governours and Subjects to
 ' be *Men*, who have the use of their own Reason and
 ' Judgment, it is impossible to state the Case of
 ' Authority and Subjection otherwise than thus :
 ' That the Faith and Judgment of Governours in-
 ' fluences

Chap. II. 'fluences and directs their Government, and gives
 ' *Laws of Faith and Manners to Subjects.* And the
 ' *Private Judgments of Subjects* direct them how far
 ' they are to *Believe and Obey their Governours,* and
 ' *God himself judges between them,* and by his Pro-
 ' vidence prevents or over-rules all those *Disorders*
 ' which may happen either in Church or State in
 ' *this World,* and rewards or punishes both *Governours*
 ' and *Subjects* according to their Deserts in the
 ' *next.* And this supercedes all farther Disputes
 ' about some *hard Cases,* or the sincerity or insin-
 ' cerity of Governours or Subjects ; for every Man
 ' must of Necessity judge for himself, for God will
 ' govern and judge us *all,* which there could be no
 ' pretence for, if we had not the free exercise of our
 ' Reason in the Government of our selves.

I think this Quotation might serve for a general Answer to all our Authors Arguments that are urged under this Head, but I promised to take notice of them in particular, which I must not forget to do.

pag. 50.

1. His first reason to prove, That *Private Judgment* cannot supersede or annul the Decrees of the Church, is, that there could be no Church Authority unless its Decrees were binding upon Private Judgments. This Argument is manifestly very Defective, and wants considerable Explanation : For it mentions the Decrees of the Church in general as binding, without making any Distinction between them, as if the Church were infallible in all her Determinations. But I believe our Author himself is not yet arrived to the perswasion that any Church is infallible in her Decrees ; and therefore we must distinguish between such of them as are within the Authority of the Church, which all her Members are obliged to submit to, and such of them as have exceeded the bounds of that just Authority which God has entrusted her with, which can have no binding force upon her Members, and the setting aside of such Decrees, is not opposing Church-Authority, but Church-Tyranny, and Church-Usurpation.

The

The Case seems to be the same between the Au- Chap. II.
 thority of the Church in *Spirituals*, and that of the
Civil Magistrate in Temporals; that both of them have
 an *Authority*, and that from *God*, is not to be dispu-
 ted, but that the Authority of them both is *limited*,
 cannot be denied: So that when either one or the
 other Decrees or Enacts what is *contrary to Gods Law*,
 there can be no *binding Obligation* upon any Man to
 submit to the One, or to comply with the Other.
 And then as to the usual Question, Who is to judge
 what is *contrary to Gods Law* or not? It is answered
 as before, both Parties must judge in their proper Ca-
 pacities, the Publick as to what it thinks fit and rea-
 sonable to Enact and Command, and the Conscience of
 every Private Man how far he believes God requires
 him to Obey, and thus both Judgments will be avail-
 able either as to the justifying or acquitting the Persons
 according to the Reasonableness or Unreasonableness
 of the Cause that determined them: So that as on
 the one hand, Men may be guilty of *Rebellion* in the
State, and of *Schism* in the Church, by withstanding
 the lawful Commands of the One, and by rejecting
 the just Decisions and reasonable Orders of the Other:
 So on the other hand, Men may be very *Imnocent* in
 not submitting to the *tyrannical* and *usurped* Autho-
 rity of Both.

2. But 'tis urged further, That the very Being of
 a Church may be destroyed by Private Judgment, if pag. 52.
 it have power to reverse its Decrees; but this does
 not follow, unless it could annul all Church Autho-
 rity, which is a Liberty we do not allow it, but leave
 it bound and obliged by all its just, and orderly, and
 reasonable Decrees: So that there can be no Church in
 Danger from the Authority of Private Judgment
 under such Restriction, unless it be such a one as is
 supported by *Usurpation*, and by unwarrantable De-
 crees would establish a *Dominion* over the Consciences
 of its Members. And to contend for the upholding
 of such a Church, can be of no service to the true
 Religion, which leaves Men at liberty to sling off all
 G such

Chap. II. such *unlawful Yokes* that are laid upon them, tho' not to dissolve *Order and Government*, without which no *Society* can subsist; and upon this bottom, we plead for the reasonableness of our own *Reformation* from *Popery*, which has carried *Church Authority* to a much greater *Height* than what *God* allows it in the *Scripture*: But the *Destruction of Popery*, strictly so called, cannot, I presume, be esteemed the opposing of *Christianity*, unless the withstanding *Tyranny*, include in it the *Dissolution of Government*.

pag. 51.

3. 'Tis next contended, That the *Church's Authority* which makes *Decrees* is *Divine*, but that of *Private Judgment* is but *Human*, and a *Human Authority* cannot reverse a *Divine one*. But the *Church's Authority* is no otherwise *Divine*, than as all *Civil Authority* may be said to be, the One being no more the Will and Ordinance of *God* than the Other, and Men may refuse *Obedience* to *Civil Governours* in unlawful *Commands*, and why not to *Ecclesiastical Ones*?

pag. 52.

Rom. 13.
1.

The Powers that be are ordained of *God*; all lawful *Authority* is *Divine Authority*, and we are not setting *Private Judgment* upon the level with *Divine Revelation*, or encouraging it to oppose what the *Church* has just *Authority to Decree*. We plead only for its not being bound by such *Decrees* as the *Church* has no *Authority to make*, such as are contrary to the *Design and Tenure of the Gospel*: Now all *usurped Authority* is only *Human Authority*, or rather no *Authority at all*, and *Private Truth* has more right and greater *Authority to convince the Judgment* than *Publick Error*.

pag. 52.

4. The following Argument, That the *lesser Private Judgment* ought to submit to the greater and more numerous one of the *Church*, which our Author therefore calls the *more certain*, is the same with what I have before observed our Author would be at, the judging of *Truth* by the greatest number of *Voices*, which, I think, is not the way to have *Justice* done it. And he grounds it upon this *mistake*, that the *Decrees of the Church* are made by the *best and most knowing*

knowing Private Judges collected in a Synod, which Chap. II. I am afraid is not always true, and certainly was not so, as to such Decrees as have been made, and that not long ago in a Neighbouring Church, which much Coun. of wiser and much better Men of the same Church have Trent. been ashamed of; and therefore, unless we could be always sure of the wisest and the best of Men in such Assemblies, it is fit we should keep our own Private Understandings to judge of their Decisions.

5. As to what is objected, *That Private Judgment pag. 52. would destroy its own Power, if it could reverse the Decrees of the Church, which are only a Collection of Private Judgments in Synods: 'Tis the particular Acts, and not the Power of such Assemblies that suffer in this Case, and all Societies have a right to annul their own Acts; but this affects only such whose Voices concurred in the Establishment of such Decrees, whose Judgments indeed would contradict themselves, if they became of a contrary Persuasion afterwards; but how this can relate to such Private Judgments, or destroy their Authority in a Private Capacity, which were dissenting to such Decrees if present in those Assemblies, or of a different Opinion as to those points if absent, I cannot comprehend.*

6. Our Author's next Argument to establish the Authority of Church Decrees, is founded upon an Assertion of his own without proof, *That the Decisi- pag. 53. on of all Controversies is left to the Judgment of the Church, that she is the last resort in all Religious Disputes, to which the Members of it are bound to submit under the penalty of being treated as Heathens. I presume our Author in this points at that place in St. Matthew's Gospel, where the injured Christian is directed to tell his Brother's fault to the Church, if 17. the injurious Person would not reform upon his more Private Admonitions. From which passage the Papists indeed do frequently argue for the infallibility and final Decisions of all Doctrines by the Church Catholick, as they term their own particular One: But 'tis plainly a forced Interpretation they put upon the place,*

Chap. II. place, for the *Text* speaks only of matters *Criminal*, which do properly belong to the *Church's Censure*, and not of *Articles of Faith*, and the *Church's Decisions* concerning them.

And as to his *matter of Fact*, that it was so at the *first Synod of Jerusalem*, the *Case* is widely different between submitting our Judgments to such *inspired Governours* as the *Apostles*, who presided in that *Synod*, who had the immediate Direction of the *Holy Ghost*, and the *mind of Christ* accompanying them; and the acquiescing in the *weak and infallible* Judgments of our *modern Rulers*, whom the *Scripture* does no where engage to preserve from *Error and Mistake*, or from *Prejudice and Corruption*.

1 Cor. 2.
16.

pag. 54.

7. What is next offered concerning *Private Judgment* proceeding upon a *less stock of Knowledge* than the *Decrees of the Church* are founded upon, to which therefore it ought to give the preference; 'tis the *very same Argument* in other Words with the *fourth* before-mentioned, and we have had too much *Tautology* of this Nature already, to be fond of repeating it.

pag. 54.

8. But our Author is now resolved to combat his Adversaries with their *own Weapons*, and to overthrow their Cause upon their *own Suppositions*: He will grant for once, that the *Church* is only a *Repository of Holy Records*, and a *witness* only for Truth, upon which bottom alone, he says, she ought to be *Believed*, and *Private Judgment* to submit to her Evidence and Authority. But there is a great deal of difference between the *Evidence of a Witness*, and the *Authoritative and Definitive Sentence of a Judge*; and tho' the *Church's Testimony* may be *valid* as to the Truth of *matters of Fact*, yet her *Authority* may be *defective* as to the Decision of Controversies about *Doctrines* and *Points of Faith*; not that even her *Testimony it self* can be binding upon any Man's Conscience to believe, if he be persuaded that he has otherwise *better Evidence* to the contrary.

9. The last particular that is urged to incapacitate *Private Judgment* from reversing the *Decrees of the Church*

Church, is, that it must appeal to some other Authority Chap. II. which is greater than the Churches, of which he knows pag. 35. none. I must take notice, that this Argument is grounded upon the Supposition, that there is a last Appeal in matters of Faith, and some magisterial Judge of Controversies appointed, which is no Protestant Principle; and granting there be not, I hope the Authority of Scripture rightly interpreted, is greater than that of Church Decrees, when contrary to the true Sense of it; and hither Private Judgment must appeal, and to Right Reason the best help to understand it; and it can never be obliged to receive any particular Interpretation of Divine Revelation as true, upon the bare Authority of the Church in determining it to be so, unless there be something further, the Authority of Reasonable Evidence, to support it. And when it happens that Church Authority and reasonable Conviction clash with each other, which is no impossible Supposition, I see no help for it, but that Private Judgment must supersede and reject such Authority, or, to speak more properly, such Usurpation.

I have now trac'd our Author through all the Steps he has taken in his Endeavours to fix the just Bounds within which Private Judgment ought to exercise itself in matters of Religion; only I remember, that examining the Arguments for his first Limitation, the fifth of them I thought did more properly belong to this last Head of Church Decrees, to which I then refer'd it, taking but a slight notice of it in its order: It is of very little weight, but perhaps it would not have been thought fair to have neglected to answer it; 'tis this, That the Church being at first established pag. 44. and settled by Miracles, and Authority given it to direct others in matters of Faith and Worship; therefore Private Judgment must submit to and follow, and not vacate and supersede its Orders and Directions. But 'tis very plain, that this Authority conferred upon the Church is a limited Authority, an Authority only to direct and instruct its Members in Gospel Truths; and therefore it admits of a very short Answer, that when it

Chap. II. it would inculcate any thing *contrary* to *Scripture*, it has no *Authority* from thence to do it, as our *Author* does himself openly confess in another place, Pag. 69.

I am not sensible of any one *material Consideration* hitherto advanced in *this Essay*, that has escaped my notice, and as they all appear to me *very Defective* in the proof of the *three Points* they are brought to establish, so I am in hopes, that what has been observed upon them, may make our *Author himself* suspect the *justness* of his *Conclusions* from them; and that *Private Judgment* may still remain possess'd of an *Authority*, notwithstanding these Arguments to the contrary, of *choosing its own Church*, or the *Rule* by which it is to walk, of *interpreting and explaining Scripture*, at least for it self, though not for others; and of *superfeding and rejecting the Decrees of the Church*, when they appear to *thwart* the plain *Sense* and *meaning of Scripture*.

And after our *Author* has taken so much pains to muster up such a number of *Arguments* to *limit its Power* in each of these particulars; it is with some *surprize* that I find him in his last Paragraph concluding this Chapter, with such *fair Concessions* to it, and in such *clear and open Terms*, that one could not have chosen *better* to have pleaded in its behalf.

pag. 56.

‘ Every *Private Person*, says he, is not only permitted, but is positively obliged according to his Abilities, and according to his outward Circumstances, to learn, study, search, and inquire after all that *Knowledge* which is necessary to inform him, not only concerning the *Truth* and *Certainty* of the *Rule* by which he is to walk, and why it is preferable to all others; but also concerning the *true meaning* and *Interpretation* of every part of that *Rule*: And he not only may, but is required to know and study the *Decrees* and *Laws* of the *Church*, how far, and for what *Reasons* they are binding, and how far agreeable to the *Word* and *Laws of God*.

I know not any thing *further* one could have ask'd Chap. II. in favour of Private Judgment, if our Author had but *stopp'd here*, and not found a way to *destroy the whole* in its Application ; But this he has effectually done, by telling us, That all this Study and industrious *searching after Truth* by private Persons, becomes their Duty, not as it tends to their own *Satisfaction*, but for the *Church's Information* : And tho' a Man be never so well assur'd of the *Truth* and *Certainty* of the *Rule* he has chosen, and of the *sense* and *meaning* of the plainest Articles of it ; yet if the *Church* take Cognizance of the Matter, and for any Considerations determine *otherwise*, all must be flung up, and the most *evident* and *momentous Truths* quitted and forsaken for fear of violating HER most sacred *Laws of Discipline and Order* : Nay, this Submission is plead- ed for as the *most rational*, tho' it be against a Man's *clearest Reason*, and most settled *Judgment* ; and as most agreeable to *Revelation*, tho' it be directly *contrary* to the *Letter* and *Design* of it, and manifestly tends to *destroy it*.

But notwithstanding our Author does thus *silence Private Judgment* by the *Church's Decision*, I find him in another place so favourable to it, as to say, that even after the Determination of a Council, *Private pag. 141. Judgment is still in force*, and may go on to try, examine, and enquire after *Truth*, provided it resorts, as usual, to the *Publick*, for a *final Determination* ; that is, *Private Judgment* must continue in its own *Persuasion*, till the *Church*, or *Publick Judgment* does finally determine so often, that it establishes the *same Opinion* ; the consistency of which which with the preceding *Paragraph* our Author is concern'd to justify.

It seems very *strange* to find a Man that values himself upon being a *Member* of the *Church of England*, and even glories in her *Communion*, fall into the *same Track* of Arguments that her profess'd *Adversaries* make use of against her : And yet I cannot but have so much *Charity* as to think, that what he has offer'd

Chap. II. offer'd was kindly-intended in her Service, and that the *Kisses* she has receiv'd from him, were given with no Intention to betray her: And I hope he will entertain the same favourable Opinion of the Design of this Examination, which is written with no other aim but to convince our Author of his Mistakes, and to keep the Church from suffering by them.

I had indeed once a design to have muster'd up as great a number of Arguments against the Authority of Publick Judgment, as to matters of Religion, in that Extent in which our Author contends for it, as he has furnish'd us with imaginary Objections against that of Private Judgment in such Matters: But I have now almost brought my self to think, that what I then propos'd, is not so necessary; partly, because the having been particular in overthrowing every thing that has been offer'd to support one side of the Controversy, is in effect establishing the contrary; and partly, because I find in the following Chapter such a considerable number of important Objections, which our Author-himself has already met with, and which do still require a little more Reflection, and and some further Answer, than what he has there given them, that I think it would be pressing him a little too hard, to add to the Burden he has already upon him, and to increase those Difficulties which he cannot at present conquer.

I shall therefore wait some time, till I see what Reception our Author gives to what I here offer him. And if I find he does not rest satisfied with my Endeavours in solving his Objections, 'tis possible I may give him an opportunity of trying his Skill in answering my own.

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REFLECTION

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BY THE

TEST



By Wm. D. D.

AND

Chancellor of the Cathedral Church
of St. Paul in London.

LONDON

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Great Britain.

TO THE

Most Reverend Father in God

WILLIAM,

By Divine Providence

Lord Archbishop of Dublin,
Primate and Metropolitan
of Ireland.

MY LORD,

Whoever with any hope of
success would contribute
to the Cure of a Malady, whether
of Body or Mind, must not only
consider the natural Force and Vir-
tue of the Medicine he prepares

for it, but also have a special regard to the Constitution and Disposition of the Patient for whom he intends it. For however a Remedy may appear in it self to be well adapted to the Disease, yet if the sick Man either is not able to take it, or has not strength sufficient to retain and digest it, it is not possible that it should avail any thing towards his Recovery.

How Epidemical the Disease, not only of *Heterodoxy* but even *Infidelity*, is become amongst us, may indeed, and ought by every good Man to be lamented; but is too plain to be either denied or dissembled: In opposition to both which, tho' many excellent Books of all sorts have been written in our own Language, and some of them with the greatest Learning and Judgment; yet because

cause many still pretend (and some of them perhaps truly) that they have not time to read large Volumes, or want Capacity to digest those that are a little more than ordinarily learned, I have ever looked upon it as a very useful Work (and much to be approved of in those who at any time have attempted it) to contract the most material Arguments that are urged in Defence of the true Religion, or any part of it; and to bring them within as narrow a compass, as may be consistent with both that Strength and Clearness, which we always suppose necessary in order to their prevailing upon the Minds of Men.

Something of this nature I have thought it my Duty, more than once, to endeavour from the Pul-

A 3. ob. of. pit.:

pit: And what I had so done, having met with some small Approbation from divers Persons of Candour and Judgment; when your Grace was pleased to lay your Commands upon me to perform, in my turn, the Office of a Preacher at your ordinary Visitation, We thought I could not do a thing more acceptable to my Brethren of the Clergy, or at least the Younger of them, than thus at one View to bring to their Remembrance the the main and most fundamental Points of our Religion, (to which we ought all of us constantly to have an eye in the whole course of our Ministry) together with some of the chief Reasons and Arguments, whereby we maintain and defend them against the several sorts of Adversaries with whom we have to do.

Dedication.

v

I therefore carefully recollected what I had to this purpose formerly studied and digested: And after I had comprised the most material part of it in an Hours Discourse, I began to entertain a Resolution of making the Whole more publick; in hopes that, through the Blessing of God, it might from the Press have as good an Effect as, I was assured, it formerly had had upon some from the Pulpit.

In order hereunto, I communicated what I had written to several of the most judicious of my Friends; who were pleased not only not to disapprove of my Design, but also to suggest some things to me, for the farther and better prosecution of the most necessary part of what I had undertaken; I mean, that which was
most

most directly levelled against *Atheism* and *Infidelity*: And this is the reason why I have now more largely insisted on the *Being of God*, and much more largely on the *Truth and Necessity of Revealed Religion*, than what at first I intended; or may seem proportionable to the other Branches of the Discourse.

Having thus troubled your Grace with an account of the Rise and Progress of this small Work, I humbly beg leave to prefix your Name before it; not only as an Acknowledgment of my being immediately accountable to your Jurisdiction for whatever Doctrine I teach, or other ministerial Act I perform within your Diocese, (which, antecedent to the Laws of the Land, I take to be a Consequence

quence from the *Divine Institution of Episcopacy*) but also as a publick Testimony of that sincere Honour and Reverence, which your Grace has a just Title to from every one, I think, who has a true Value for either our Religious or Civil Constitution.

It is an unjust Reflection which some Men affect to make upon all Dedications of this sort; almost without any distinction; That for a Man to speak well of the Patron he has made choice of, is, in their Opinion, little else but Flattery. But the reason why the Life of a good Man is by all allowed to be written and published after his Death, will, I think, hold also as well for the giving him his due Character even while he is alive: I mean, that it may be an Incitement

ment to others to follow his Example: And, provided a Man says no more than what is true; to condemn him of any secret or sinister Design therein, is to assume the Place of God himself, in passing judgment upon the private Thoughts of the Heart, which are only known unto him who is both the Maker and Searcher of it.

Had I a Design of writing a Panegyrick on your Grace, I am sure there is very sufficient Matter for it. The Strictness of your Life, yet without Moroseness or Sourness of Temper, all along from your Youth; your great Knowledge in all the useful Parts of Learning, notwithstanding the almost constant Interruption of your Studies, which for above these thirty Years past has unavoidably

ably attended you ; your great Labour and Diligence in the *personal* Discharge of your Cure, while you were a Parish-Minister ; your frequent and vigorous appearing in behalf of our Church and Religion, against Enemies of all Sorts ; and more particularly at the Time when it was thought most dangerous so to do ; [*Anno* 1687.] your unwearied Care and Vigilance in settling the Affairs of that Diocese unto which you were most deservedly promoted, after the late times of Confusion ; your more than ordinary Caution in admitting no Man to Holy Orders or a Cure of Souls, until by a strict Examination he appears to be sufficiently qualified, both as to his Life and Learning ; your narrow Inspection into the Behaviour of all your Clergy ;

gy; and as far as it is possible, into every thing under your Charge within your Diocese and Province; your Patience in hearkening to every Man that has any reasonable Cause of applying to you; your Readiness, as you have Opportunity, to encourage every Man who honestly Endeavours to perform his Duty; your great Temper, as upon all other Occasions, so particularly in disregarding the rude Behaviour of those who seem to lay hold on any Opportunity to provoke you; the Mildness as well as Weight of your Reproofs to those that offend; your Readiness to pardon every Man that conscientiously returns to his Duty; and Resolution in punishing (to your Power) those who obstinately persist in the Breach of it; your Hospitality-

pitality, Liberality, Charity; and (that I may not run out into numberless Particulars) your constant Adherence to the true Interest of Church and State; and Courage upon all Occasions to discharge a good Conscience, without any regard to the Passions of Men or the Humour of this or that Party; all this, I say, and more that might be reckoned up, would be a Subject ample enough to enlarge upon, had I the Vanity to think that any thing I can say would in the least Contribute to make your Grace better known than you already are to all good Men amongst us.

If I do not offend your Grace in thus making publick mention of these things; I am perswaded that no other good Man will in the
64 a least

least find Fault with me for it;
and, for the *uncharitable* part of
the World, I hope I have learn't
so much from your Grace's Exam-
ple, as not to regard their Cen-
sures. I am with all Respect and
Duty,

Your Grace's

Most Obedient

and

Humble Servant,

Edw. Synge.

THE

THE PREFACE.

IT is a melancholy Reflection; that many Men affect to treat Religion, and the Persons who are the immediate Officers of it, with more Spite and ill Nature than they do any other thing whatsoever. For Example, that many unnecessary Curiosities have been brought in, to the clogging and Perplexing both of Law and Physick; and that there have been not a few unfair and corrupt Practitioners in both those Faculties, is what honest and sober Physicians and Lawyers, as well as other Men, have often complain'd of; yet no Man has hitherto been so wild as to insinuate from hence that therefore both these noble Professions should be (not only amended and reformed but) wholly exploded and laid aside. And altho' there have been Multitudes of Pettyfoggers and Empiricks in all Ages, yet still there is no Man but believes that there are, or at least may be, many very honest Lawyers and Physicians in the World.

But with respect to Religion, and the Ministers of it, there is a Party of Men who endeavour to suggest another way of reasoning; and because it is not deny'd but that there have been many false Religions brought into the World, therefore they will allow none to be true. Because we own that the true Religion has in divers Places and Ages been corrupted, (partly by Ignorance and partly by the Craft of designing Men) therefore they will allow no Part of it to be genuine and sound: And because it is not contested but that there have been many ambitious and wicked Men, who for evil and worldly Ends have thrust themselves into the Offices of the true as well as false Religions, therefore under the Name of Priests (whom without distinction they render as odious as may be) they endeavour to explode and wholly lay aside the very Office of the Ministry; altho' for fashion sake, they would sometimes seem to allow that there is some little Truth in Religion: And hence it has come to pass that Christianity has been industriously drest up in a Fool's Coat, and treated as if it were no better than a Fable or idle Tale; that Priests of all Religions without any Distinction have been pronounced to be the same, and the Sentence received with the Applause of many; and all manner of distinction between those who are to minister in the Offices of Religion, and the People who are to receive the Benefit of such Ministry, by some has been represented as nothing more than

than a Design of crafty Men to gain to themselves a Dominion over the Consciences of others.

But how contrary is this way of arguing to that Clearness and Strength of Reason, which these men seem so much to admire and stand up for? Put the Case that ninety and nine parts of an hundred of all the Lawyers and Physicians in the World should prove Fools or Knaves, would this be a good Reason why any Man should wholly reject either Law or Physick, and refuse to hearken to, or make the least use of a sober and honest Man of either Profession, where his Health or Estate were concerned? And if there had been more Knavery among the Priests than even they who aggravate those things beyond Measure do pretend; would it follow from hence that therefore the Office of the Ministry it self is only a Cheat, and Religion no better than a Fiction? Certainly they who think freely ought always to judge of Matters, by the Reason of things, and not by the real or pretended corrupt Practices of any set or order of Men: And upon this Issue I have endeavoured in the following Discourse intirely to put the Cause of Religion.

My design being to offer unto others the same full and clear Conviction which (I bless God) I have in my own Mind about the things I write of; wherever I have had occasion to propose a Difficulty, I have not in the least endeavoured to conceal the Strength of it: And altho' I think I have given a sufficient
and

and satisfactory Answer to every Objection that has come in my way, yet because it is possible that my Words may not always fully convey the utmost of my Thoughts to the Mind of my Reader, I have only this Request to make to him, that upon all such Occasions as those, he would endeavour to supply whatever defects he finds me to have been guilty of, and consider not only what I have said, but also what farther might, if necessary, be offered upon each subject. And if what I here write has but so far an effect upon him as to put him upon a sober and impartial Enquiry after farther and better Satisfaction than what he thinks I have been able to give him; I shall look on my pains to be very well bestowed.

THE

THE CONTENTS.

SECT. I. *The Introduction.*

SECT. II. *Four Propositions laid down.*

SECT. III. *Proposition 1. Every Man ought to have some Reason for his Religion.*

SECT. IV. *Prop. 2. This Reason ought to be fit to convince others, as well as to satisfy himself.*

SECT. V. *Prop. 3. Every Man should be ready to give this Reason when fairly demanded.*

SECT. VI. *Prop. 4. And this ought to be done with Meekness and without giving Offence.*

SECT. VII. *Inferences drawn from these Propositions: First for the use of Reason in matters of Religion.*

SECT. VIII. *Secondly against those who take their Religion upon trust from their Parents or Country.*

SECT. IX. *Thirdly against that immediate Revelation which the Quakers pretend to, as the Ground of their Religion.*

SECT. X. *Fourthly against building our Faith upon the Church of Rome.*

SECT. XI. *Fifthly against hindring the common People from studying the Holy Scriptures.*

SECT. XII. *Sixthly in the Defence of the Ground of our own Religion: The handling of this brought under four Questions.*

SECT. XIII. *Question 1. Why we are of any Religion at all? The being of God proved.*

SECT.

Sect. XIV. *Quest. 2. Why we are Christians?*

Sect. XV. *That Christianity is from God, prov'd,
First from its own intrinsic Wisdom and Good-*
ness.

Sect. XVI. *Secondly from Prophecies.*

Sect. XVII. *Thirdly from Miracles.*

Sect. XVIII. *Fourthly from its Success in the World.*

Sect. XIX. *Difficulties clear'd up, viz. Why was not
the Gospel planted in all Parts of the World
alike?*

Sect. XX. *How came so many to oppose it; and others
to corrupt it? And how came it to lose Ground in
so many places?*

Sect. XXI. *Why does not God sufficiently enlighten the
Mind of every Man?*

Sect. XXII. *What necessity is there for any Revealed
Religion at all?*

Sect. XXIII. *How do we know that no farther Reve-
lation of Religion has been made since Christi-*
anity?

Sect. XXIV. *Quest. 3. Why we are Protestants?*

Sect. XXV. *Quest. 4. Why Protestants of the Estab-
lished Church?*

Sect. XXVI. *Two Objections answer'd; First that all
this amounts not to Infallibility.*

Sect. XXVII. *Secondly that all this Reasoning seems
to be above vulgar Capacities.*

Sect. XXVIII. *The Conclusion*

Reli-

Religion Tryed

BY THE

TEST of REASON.

§. I. **M**Y Intention in the following Discourse being with what brevity and plainness I can, to bring *Christianity*, as it is professed in the *Established Church*, to a fair and equal, yet strict and impartial Tryal at the Bar of *Reason*: For the more clear and Methodical proceeding herein, I know no better way than to take my Beginning, and Rule of Direction in this whole Affair, from those remarkable Words of the blessed Apostle *St. Peter*; which ought, I think, to make a deep Impression upon the Mind of every one who reads or hears them; *1 Pet. 3. 15. Be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear.* And before I come to draw any thing from the Words themselves, it will not be amiss to give a short Account of the Occasion of them, and their Connection with the rest of the Chapter.

At the tenth Verse of this Chapter St. Peter assures us that the best and most certain way for a Man to live with Safety and Security to himself, even in this World, is to be truly Vertuous and Religious: *He that will love life and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile; let him eschew evil and do good; let him seek peace and ensue it.*

For the Confirmation of this Truth, he offers two Reasons: The first in the twelfth Verse; namely, that good Men are in the Favour, and consequently, under the immediate Protection of Almighty God; while the Wicked are exposed, even in this Life to his Wrath and Vengeance: For (says he) *the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their Prayers: But the face of the Lord is against them that do evil.*

The other Reason (contained in the thirteenth Verse) is drawn from that Temper and Disposition which even naturally prevails in Mankind, if it be not perverted by evil Principles, or Passion; that is to say, not to hurt, or injure those, who are so far from giving them any just Provocation, that, on the contrary, they are ready upon all Occasions, by kind and charitable Offices, to engage and win the Love and Good-will of all that they converse with. *And who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?* As if he had said in other Words, If those Men amongst whom you live, however of a different Perswasion from you in Religion, do always by Experience find that your Behaviour is inoffensive, and that Truth, Justice and Charity do constantly prevail with you, and have a never-failing Influence upon all your Actions; what Man amongst them is there, or can there be, who, if he be guided but by

Sect. I. *by the Test of Reason.*

3

by the common Principles of Reason and Prudence, will ever offer to do you any Hurt, when thereby it is evident that he can derive no real Benefit or Advantage to himself? *When a Man's Ways do thus please the Lord*, he may have a probable Expectation, even by the Rules of Reason as well as those of Religion, that *his Enemies*, if they are not altogether irrational in their Proceedings, will become so far reconcil'd, as at least to *be at peace with him*, Prov. 16. 7.

But when it is considered how much the greatest part of Mankind are overswayed and governed by their Passions and Prejudices, in direct Opposition, very often, both to Reason and Religion; the Consequence from hence must needs (sometimes at least) be, that the more careful and exact a Man is in the Performance of his Duty, the more certainly may he expect to be hated and persecuted by some sort of Men for it.

In order therefore to arm and prepare all Christians for such Hatred and Persecution, as God in his Providence, for their better Tryal, sometimes suffers to befall them; the Apostle proceeds to recommend unto them the three following Qualifications. *First*, That they be courageous and resolute; in the fourteenth Verse, *But and if ye suffer for righteousness sake, happy are ye; and be not afraid of their terrour, neither be troubled.* *Secondly*, That they be inwardly and sincerely pious and holy; in the former part of the fifteenth Verse, *But sanctify* (says he) *the Lord God in your hearts.* And *Thirdly*, That they be well instructed and grounded in that Religion which they profess; in the Words of my Text, (for so I may have leave to call that Passage of Holy Scripture which I have chosen for the Ground work of my whole Discourse) *Be ready always to give an answer*

to every man that askeb you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear.

To ask a Man a Reason of the Hope that is in him, signifies here, neither more nor less than in other Terms to demand why he is of such a Religion; and upon what Ground he expects to be saved by it. And the Word *Fear* I take, in this place to be put not to signify the Fear of God, (altho' it may well enough be understood in that Sence also) and much less the Fear of suffering for Religion, or a good Conscience, (which St. Peter had just before forbid in the fourteenth Verse, as our Saviour also has expressly done, *Mat. 10. 28.*) but rather to be added as a farther Explication of the Word *Meekness*; and to denote a Fear or Caution of offending or exasperating the Person, or Persons, who at any time shall put such Questions or Demands to us, as my Text requires us to return an Answer to.

§. II. From the Words thus opened and explained, we may fairly draw these four Propositions.

First, That every Man ought to have some Reason for his being of that Religion which he professes. For how could it be possible for a Man to give an Answer to him that asks him a Reason of his Religion, if he has not first some Reason for it himself.

Secondly, That the Reason upon which a Man grounds his Religion ought to be such, as not only satisfies himself, but also may be fit and proper to convince any other Person, who duly and impartially weighs and considers it. For it would be to no manner of Purpose to offer any Reason for Religion (or indeed for any thing whatsoever) if the Reason so offered were not proper, in its own Nature, for the Conviction of such as should hearken to it.

Thirdly,

Sect. III. *by the Test of Reason.* 5

Thirdly, That every Man, when he is thereunto duly called and required, should be ready freely to give the Reason for his being of such a Religion, unto any one that demands it from him: Or (in the Words of my Text) to give an Answer to every one who asketh a reason of the hope that is in him, as the Apostle here directs.

And Fourthly and lastly, That this Reason ought always to be given in so mild and meek a manner, as may not tend to exasperate, or give any just Ground of Offence unto any one that asks it: Or with Meekness and Fear, as my Text expresses it.

That these four Propositions are contained in the Text, and justly raised from it, I take to be sufficiently plain; I proceed now to offer what may be necessary for the farther Confirmation of each of them in the order they lie; and then from the whole, shall endeavour to draw such Inferences, as appear to be most proper and useful.

§. III. First then, that every Man ought to have some Reason for his being of that Religion which he professes. Nor is this any more than what is required from us in divers places of the Holy Scriptures. St. Paul directs us first to prove all things, and then to hold fast that which is good, 1 Thel. 5. 21. St. John gives us a Caution that we should not believe every Spirit; but make use of our Understanding, and whatever Helps God has furnished us with, to try the Spirits whether they are of God, 1 John 4. 1. The Men of Berea are approved of and commended, for searching the Scriptures of the Old Testament, (whose Authority they had before upon good Grounds received) whether those things which St. Paul taught were so, Acts 17. 11. The same Apostle appeals to the common Reason of Man, when he says I speak as to wise men, judge

ye what I say, 1 Cor. 10. 15. And even our Saviour himself sufficiently intimates, that every Man's own Judgment, upon the best Information he can get, must be to him the immediate Ground and Rule of his Religion; when he condescends to submit even his own Mission and Doctrine to this Tryal: *Yea, and why even of your selves judge ye not what is right?* says he, *Luke 12. 57.*

To these Passages of Holy Scripture many more, if occasion were, might be added; which, tho' not all of them so directly and expressly, yet by the clearest and best Consequence, do confirm and illustrate the Truth of this first Proposition. But if we have recourse to the Reason of the thing, it will set the Matter in a most clear Light, and demonstrate beyond Exception, the Folly of that Man who takes his Religion upon Trust, or without such Proof as may be sufficient to convince and satisfy his own Mind of the Truth of it.

In all Matters of great and serious Consequence, no Man of common Prudence will proceed to act blindly and at random; but will always, to the best of his Power, first enquire into the Ground and Reason of what he is to do, before he ventures upon it. He that should buy or sell an Estate, build or pull down his House, or change his Habitation from one Place or Country to another, and not know why or for what Reason he does any of these things, would by all be looked upon as guilty of very great Folly, because upon such things as these the Comfort and Satisfaction of this present Life is supposed in a very great measure to depend: But what can be of greater, or so great Moment and Consequence to us, as Religion? upon which altogether depends the Favour of God, the
Peace

Sect. IV. *by the Test of Reason.*

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Peace of our Conscience, and our eternal Welfare, or Misery never to be retrieved. If then, even in the Affairs of this World, which are but of an inferior Concern to us, we always think it necessary to weigh our Actions, and have a Reason for them, before we venture upon Matters that are of any Importance; much more certainly ought we to do the same in the Case of Religion, the Concern whereof is no less than eternal.

Farthermore, it is a Principle universally maintained: if not by all the World, yet at least by all such as profess Christianity; that if God, in the Course of his Providence, calls a Man thereunto, he ought readily to suffer any Persecution or Torment for the sake of his Religion, and undergo even Death it self, if there be occasion, rather than renounce or deny it: But he that should suffer all this, and yet not know why or wherefore he did so, whatever Opinion we might have of his Courage, it is certain we ought to have but very little of his Wisdom; and where a Man has no sufficient Reason for his Religion, it is not possible he should have any such for his Suffering for it.

If then in a Business of the greatest Concern, we ought by no means to act blindly and by chance, not knowing whether we are in the right or the wrong; and if upon occasion we would not suffer, like Fools, we know not why, it is no less than necessary that *every one of us should have some good Reason for the Religion we profess*; which was my first Proposition.

§. IV. I proceed to the second, which was, *That the Reason upon which a Man grounds his Religion, ought to be such, as not only satisfies himself, but also may be fit and proper to convince any other*

other Person who duly and impartially weighs and considers it.

If Religion were intended by God for a Secret, of which when a Man had gotten the Knowledge, he were to keep it to himself, and communicate it to no other Person; then indeed if he were once in his own Mind and Understanding, sufficiently satisfied about it; it were no matter whether his Reasons were known or not known to the rest of the World; or what other Men did or might think of them: But the Case of Religion is quite otherwise; In which as all Men are universally concerned; so is it the Design and Command of God, that it should every where be publicly taught and propagated amongst all Mankind; that every Man, who will but give impartial Attention to it, may come to the Knowledge, and embrace the Profession of it: For which end, as the Apostles of Christ were sent abroad with Commission and a Command to *Preach the Gospel to every Creature*, Mark 16. 15. so has God appointed a perpetual Order of Ministers in the Church, for the constant carrying on of the same Work, to the end of the World, wherever they can gain Admittance; besides, the Obligation that lyes upon Parents to *bring up their Children in the Nurture and Admonition of the Lord*, Eph. 6. 4. that is to say, both in the Knowledge and Practice of Religion; and upon all Christians whatsoever to *Edifie*, 1 Thess. 5. 11. that is, in private Conversation, to instruct, admonish, and persuade one another, according to their several Abilities and Opportunities: But if the Reasons, upon which Religion is grounded, are not fit and proper in their Nature, to convince and satisfy every Man, who without Prepossession or Prejudice attends unto them, the Propagation of it throughout the World, in the manner prescribed,

scribed, would be a thing altogether impossible; and therefore absurd to be either commanded or intended. For whosoever should go about to persuade other Men to believe Doctrines, obey Laws, regard Threatnings, or rely upon Promises, without offering them sufficient Reason to convince them of their Truth, Obligation, and Certainty; as in all probability, he would gain but very few Profelytes, so would he most justly deserve with Scorn to be rejected by all Men of Sense and Understanding. It remains therefore that either Religion is not to be propagated in the Way which God has directed, and is the only Method that suits with rational Creatures; or else the Reasons upon which it is grounded must be such as are fit and proper, in their own Nature, to convince every Man, who duly and impartially Weighs and Considers them: Which was my second Proposition.

§. V. I pass on to the Third, which was this, That every Man, when he is thereunto duly called and required, should be ready freely to give the Reason for his being of such a Religion, unto any one that demands it from him.

It is not indeed every Man's Business to dispute or maintain an Argument for his Religion: Disputation is an Art, and requires long Study and much Practice, for a Man to become skilful in it; and he that has even the best Cause to manage, may yet, if he be a Stranger to this Art, be easily baffled by a cunning and sophistical Adversary; and the plainest Truths may be much injured by a weak and unpracticed Defender of them: Nor is every Man who may be fit to be received into the Church of Christ, presently to think himself qualified for doubtful Disputations, Rom. 14. 1. An honest Man, who with a very good Conscience engages in a Law-Suit, altho' he is able to give

to any impartial Man a fair and satisfactory Account of the Justice of his Cause, yet may not be fit to plead it in the Court; and a sincere Christian who can give very good Reasons for the Religion he professes, may in like manner, be of as little Ability to dispute for it.

Nor can it be the Duty even of the most learned Men and able Disputants, for ever to be wrangling with such as are *contentious* and obstinate, and will *not obey the Truth*, Rom. 2. 8. altho' proposed to them with sufficient Evidence for their Conviction: For this would be only to bestow their Time and Labour in vain, which might be employed to better and more useful Purposes. If an *Heretick* will not be reclaimed, even by repeated Instructions and *Admonitions*, he is to be *rejected*, Tit. 3. 10. At least until such time as there may appear to be some better hopes of him; and it was our Blessed Saviour's own Direction to his Apostles, that *wheresoever men would not receive them, nor hear their words, they should depart out of that house or city, and shake off the dust of their feet for a testimony against them*, Mat. 10. 14. Luke 9. 5. which was accordingly put in practice by St. Paul and Barnabas, Acts 13. 45, 51. whose Example being grounded on the exprefs Instruction of Christ himself, may certainly be followed by every Teacher or Preacher of the Gospel.

But as every Man, however unable to dispute much for his Religion, yet ought to have some good Reason for it, as I have already shewn; so ought he to be ready to offer this Reason to any one who demands it of him. And this he is obliged to do, as well for the Credit and Reputation of his Religion, as out of Love and Charity to the Soul of his Neighbour.

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As to the former of these; every Man in his several Station, and according to his Capacity, ought certainly to endeavour to bring true Religion as much into Repute as he can; and to *adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things, Tit. 2. 10.* This being the only way we have to advance the Honour of our Creator; for whose Glory we ought above all things to be concerned. But what greater Discredit can there be brought upon Religion, than that they who profess it should be either unable or unwilling to give any just Reason for their so doing? It makes it look as if it were only a Device and Contrivance to impose upon the World, and had nothing of *Truth* and Reality in it; when they dare not fairly bring it to the *Light*, that it may be *manifest* that it comes from *God, John 3. 21.* But, on the other side, when they who own and profess the true Religion, are ready upon all occasions to give such Reasons for it, as do not only clearly and thoroughly satisfy themselves, but are also proper and fit to convince all other Men, that impartially give Ear unto them: This most evidently demonstrates both their own Sincerity and also the Truth of that Religion which they profess; and consequently frees it from all Suspicion of Imposture, and advances its Reputation with all sober and considering Men.

Then, as to the other thing mentioned, namely, Love and Charity; we are partly taught by the Law of Nature, and more fully and distinctly by that of Christianity, that we ought to have an universal Love for all Men; and consequently that we are obliged to do them all the Good which at any time reasonably may lie within our power: Now the greatest Good which one Man can do another, and that without any In-

convenience to himself, is to assist and promote him in the Attainment of eternal Happiness; which is not any other way to be done, but by forwarding him in the Profession and Practice of true Religion; to a due Sense of which, it is not possible to bring a Man any other way, than by laying the Grounds and Reasons of it fairly before him: And however any one may be conscious to himself of the Weakness of his own Understanding, or his Inability to argue or dispute much, even for the Truth it self; yet if with Honesty and Sincerity he has first sought for Satisfaction in Religion, and then upon any fair occasion proposes to another what he himself is so satisfied with, and this without betraying or injuring his Cause, by pretending to say more for it, than what he is qualified for; he knows not how great a Blessing, and what good Success God may be pleased to give to his pious and charitable Endeavours: Especially if his Words are accompanied with that *Meekness* and Gentleness, which is one of the peculiar Marks of true Christianity.

§. VI. And this brings me to my fourth and last Proposition, namely, That *this Reason* (whatever it be which is offered for Religion) *ought always to be given in so mild and meek a manner, as may not tend to exasperate or give any just Ground of Offence, unto any one that asks it.*

It is a Fault, and I think a very great one, which too many of all Parties and Perswasions are guilty of, that when once they differ in Opinion about Religion, they often are not content to debate the Matter with Sobriety and Calmness; but they frequently give reproachful Language, and run out into personal Reflections, with bitter and satyrical Invectives, or at least oblique and harsh

harsh Insinuations, each against the other; of which I wish the Writings of some learned Men of all Sides, were not too notorious an Instance: Who, while they appear zealous, each of them, for what they think to be the *Truth*, are often very forgetful of the plain Obligations of *Charity*; which surely is never the less due to a Man, for being of a different Opinion from us. But methinks that even Reason it self, as well as my Text, should teach us to proceed after another manner; that is to say, always to propose whatever we have to offer in behalf of Religion, after so meek and gentle a way, as at least not justly to provoke our Adversaries to Passion, however obstinate they may be against Conviction.

Whosoever writes or speaks in Defence of Religion, his Design I suppose is, or at least ought always to be, first to convince the Judgment, by enlightening the Understanding of those to whom he applies himself; and having gained over the Judgment to the Acknowledgment of the Truth, then to influence the Will and Affections towards the Practice of it: Now, as there is a decent Warmth, tempered with Gravity, that is very proper to rouse and awaken such as seem to be asleep in Sin and Error, (of which we have more than once an Example in our Blessed Saviour himself, in his dealing with the Scribes and Pharisees) so if a Man goes beyond this, and either sharpens, or rather sours his Discourse with Satyr and Mockery, or embitters it with Railing and Scurrility; the natural Consequence here of will be, immediately to raise the Passion of those who find themselves thus uncharitably treated, and thereby to darken their Understanding, and render them so much the less capable of any sober or rational Conviction; which is directly contrary to the
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very End and Design that in all Disputes (about Religion especially) every good Man ought to propose to himself. Whereas on the other hand, if Men on these occasions would always take Care to deliver themselves with as much Calmness and Moderation as the Case will bear, and never say any thing merely and on purpose only to provoke and vex their Adversaries; such soft *Answers* as these (especially if mutually given) would not fail to *turn away* at least some part of that *Wrath*, (Prov. 15. 1.) which now so strangely prevails between those of different Opinions in Religion; and consequently dispose them, much more than at present they seem to be, first for the discovering, and then for the embracing of whatever shall appear to be a solid and real Truth: To which End and Purpose, the Admonition of St. Paul ought never to be forgotten by us, 2 Tim. 2. 24. *The servant of the Lord must not strive, but be gentle unto all men; apt to teach; patient; in meekness instructing those who oppose themselves, if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth.*

And thus have I done with the four Propositions, which from my Text I laid down to be handled. Let us see now what proper and useful Inferences may be drawn from them.

§. VII. *First* then, from what has been said it will follow, *That Reason is always to be made use of in Matters of Religion.*

True indeed it is, that our Reason alone, without the Assistance of Revelation, could never have dived into the mysterious Recesses of Christianity; nor must we pretend, by the utmost Improvement of it, to be able fully to comprehend even those things which God has been pleased to reveal to us; for as yet *we know but in part, and see but as*
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through a Glass darkly, as St. Paul speaks, 1 Cor. 13. 12. But notwithstanding this, as our Reason is a necessary means to bring us to Religion, by enabling us to receive all such Proof as can be made of it; so is it no less needful for the right Understanding both of its Doctrines and Precepts, and the drawing of useful Consequences from them. How does *St. Paul* reason with the *Athenians* concerning the Nature of God, and the Worship that is due to him? and when *Felix* sent for him, and heard him concerning the Faith in Christ, he reasoned of Righteousness, Temperance, and Judgement to come: *Acts 17. 22, &c.* How does our blessed Saviour prove against the Sadducees, the Certainty of a future State, and the Resurrection from the Dead, by a rational Deduction of Consequences from the Words of God unto *Moses*; for if *Abraham, Isaac and Jacob* were utterly dissolved, and in a state of Insensibility, from whence they were never to return, (as the Sadducees supposed) How could God at that very time, with the least congruity of Speech, be said to be their God? and (to omit numberless Instances of most accurate reasoning that occur throughout the Holy Scriptures) How is it possible for a Man to have such Reason for his Religion, as may not only satisfy himself, but also be sufficient to convince others of the Truth of it; (as I have shewn from my Text that every Christian is obliged to have) if in the whole procedure, and every part of it he be not allowed to make a sober use of his rational Faculties? For when a Man shall ask us a Reason why we believe and rely upon such and such Principles of our Religion, in order to our Salvation; if the Answer we return be not agreeable to the plain and allowed Rules of Reason, it must needs be impertinent and wide from the Purpose.

In a Word, I would desire all those who seem to discountenance the use of Reason in matters of Religion, only to consider that Reason is nothing else but rightly to apprehend what is proposed to our Understanding, as far as it is so proposed, truly to judge of what we so apprehend; and regularly to draw Consequences from such Principles as have rightly possessed themselves of our Judgment; and as far as any Man does these three things, so far beyond dispute he makes use of his Reason: And will any Man say that he does not constantly do all these in Matters of Religion? For if he does not, then either he apprehends not at all, or else misapprehends what God has proposed to him; he judges not at all, or else frames a wrong Judgment concerning such things, and draws no Consequences at all, or else such as are false and absurd from them. The monstrous Absurdity of which three things is so great, that no Man in his Wits, sure will either defend or countenance them.

§. VIII. Secondly, From hence it appears, how great an Absurdity they are guilty of, who ground their Religion upon no better Foundation than only that it was the Profession of their Parents or Ancestors, that they have been educated in it, or that it is the Religion of their Kindred or Country.

Ask many of the Roman Catholicks of this Kingdom of Ireland, why they adhere to a Religion, that has so many Errors and even gross Absurdities in it; and that with so much Obstinacy, that they will not so much as listen, or give attention to better Information; and this is the Answer which commonly they will give you, that all their Forefathers, for many Generations, have been of this Perswasion; and this is the Religion of their best Friends and Relations,

tions, and generally of all their Countrymen, and therefore why should not they be of it? And tho' Protestants, who have sufficient Opportunities of more and better Knowledge, ought therefore to be furnished with a more satisfactory *Reason of the Hope that is in them*, yet I fear there are too many even of this Profession, that can give little other Account why they are so, but only that their Parents or Friends have brought them up in it; but he who has no better Ground than this for his Religion, most certainly places it upon a very false and deceitful Foundation. For whatever Opinion he himself may have of the Judgment and Integrity of those Persons upon whose Credit alone he so much relies; yet I have shewn that the Reason which every Man should have for his Religion, not only ought to be such as may fully *satisfy himself*, but *must be fit and proper to convince others also*; whereas such Pretences as these, may as strongly be pleaded for any *false Religion* as for the true one; for a *Heathen in China*, or a *Mahometan in Turkey* altogether as plausibly as for any sort of *Christian* in any part of *Europe*; and therefore can by no means be proper or effectual, to perswade any sober Man of the Truth of any Religion whatsoever.

§. IX. *Thirdly*, It also follows, that *they who are called Quakers are in a very great Error; who ground their Religion upon a pretended immediate Revelation, made (as they alledge) unto themselves in particular, by the Spirit of God.*

They affirm, *That the Testimony of the Spirit is that alone by which the true Knowledge of God, can be only revealed. These Divine inward Revelations, they make absolutely necessary for the building up of true Faith; nor are they (say they) to be*
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subjected to the Examination either of the outward Testimony of the Scriptures, or the natural Reason of Man, as to a more noble or certain Rule or Touch-stone: For this Divine Revelation and inward Illumination, is that which is evident and clear of it self, forcing by its own Evidence and Clearness, the well-disposed Understanding to assent, irresistably moving the same thereunto: As their ablest Writer Robert Barclay tells us *.

It is no part of my present Design to dispute with these Men, what other Criterion, besides Reason and Scripture, they can have to satisfy themselves, that what they call a *Divine immediate Revelation* is really such; and not a strong impulse only of their own warm Imagination, or sometimes even of *Satan himself*, who (as St. Paul assures us 2 Cor. 11. 14.) is transformed into an angel of light. But taking it as for granted that they have all imaginable Assurance of this within themselves, yet still I demand how, and upon what good Ground, can they convince another of the Truth and Reality of what they thus pretended to?

That Reason is a Light to every Man; that by a sober use of it, we are enabled to receive the solid Proofs that are brought for Revealed Religion, and (as far as is necessary) to understand the Doctrine and Precepts of it; that God, by the Grace and Assistance of his Holy Spirit, is pleased farther to open the Hearts and Understanding of Men (*Acts 16. 14. Luke 24. 45.*) that they attend unto the things of Religion, and understand the Scriptures wherein they are contained: And, lastly, that it is in his Power, by *immediate Revelation*, at any time to communicate any Truth to whom-

* Barclay's Apol. Prop. 2.

whomsoever he thinks fit : All this, I say, is freely granted. But if any Man shall go beyond all this, and set up such a *Revelation*, immediately made to himself, as the *Ground and Foundation of his Religion*; he ought to be able (as I have already shewn) to give such sufficient and satisfactory Proof thereof, as may convince others of its Truth and Reality : For if such Revelation is once to be allowed, without any other Proof than the Assertion of those who pretend to it; they may run into all the whimsical Extravagancies, and advance the most horrid Blasphemies imaginable; and who shall dare controul or contradict them in what they do by *Divine Revelation*? Or if such a Revelation pretended to by one Man, shall be opposed by the like Revelation, with as much Confidence pretended to by another; How shall we know who is in the Right and who in the Wrong, except some outward Proof be given, whereby other Men as well as themselves, may be enabled to distinguish between a Revelation and a Delusion?

All the Revelations of Religion, that God has hitherto been pleased to make to Mankind, have (partly by Miracles, and partly by other Acts of his Providence) been sufficiently attested; not only *inwardly* to those who immediately received them, but also *outwardly* to every one who would make an impartial Enquiry into the Truth of them; Nor did our Saviour himself * expect that Credit should be given even to his own Divine Mission and Revelation, upon any other Terms. Some sufficient outward Proof then we require of those inward Revelations which these Men pretend to; which until they shall give, and that in

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* Luke 7. 22. Mark 16. 17.

a very satisfactory manner, we cannot but conclude that the very Foundation, upon which they build their whole Religion, is altogether deceitful and delusive, however speciously they have contrived the Superstructure, to make it look fair and plausible to the World.

§. X. *Fourthly*, Another Consequence, no less fairly deducible from the Premisses, I take to be that *they are altogether* in an Error, who build their Faith entirely upon the Credit and Authority of the Church of Rome.

To set this Matter in a true and clear Light, let us suppose the Question to be put to a sober Papist, Why he believes that System of Doctrines which make up the Religion of that Church, and consequently why he hopes to be saved in that Belief? and the Answer he will give you is this, That the immediate Reason of his Belief, is the Authority of God, who has made these Doctrines known to Mankind. If you demand, What Assurance he has that God has made these Doctrines known? he will tell you he is sure of it, because he finds them taught as Divine Truths, and proposed as Objects of Faith by the Church. And if you farther ask, How he knows that that Society of Men, who live in Communion with the Pope or Bishop of Rome, constitutes and makes up the Church? all the Answer he can possibly give you to this Question, must of necessity be resolved into this, That he is certain it is the true Church, because it makes Profession of the true Faith *. For whatever Notes or Marks of the Church they pretend to reckon up, there are but three Things that go to make up the formal Essence,

* Bellarm. de Eccles. Milit. L. 3. C. 2. 5. Nostra autem.

sence, and complete the Definition of it; namely, First, *The Profession of the true Faith.* Secondly, *The Participation of the Sacraments.* And, Thirdly, *A due Subjection to lawful Pastors.* The two last of which (according to themselves) are either Parts, or at least inseparable Consequences of the first; it being always reckoned amongst them as a matter of Faith, to believe the Number, Nature and Necessity of their Sacraments; and to own the Power and Authority of the Pope, and other Pastors, that, according to the Laws of their Church, are in Subordination to him.

Thus then the Matter stands: A Papist believes his Faith and Religion to be true, because it is revealed by God: That it is revealed by God, he believes because he finds it professed and taught by the true Church: And that this same Society of Men which he means doth make up and constitute the true Church, he also believes for this Reason, because they profess and maintain the true Faith and Religion; and so proves the first thing by the second; the second by the third, and the third by the first again: Which is a way of arguing that the Logicians call a *Circle*, and is justly exploded by all Men of the least Sense and Understanding.

Since then (as I have shewn) every Man ought to have some good Reason for his Religion, which may be fit and proper not only to satisfy himself, but also to convince others; and since this way of reasoning in a Circle cannot possibly afford any true Conviction or Satisfaction to any Man; it follows that they who have no better support than this for their Religion, do certainly build it upon a false Foundation.

§. XI. *Fifthly*, From what has been said, it may be farther inferred against the Church of *Rome*; that,

that, however necessary it may be frequently to admonish all Sorts of Men, that they be very cautious and sober in all the Interpretations which at any time they put upon the Word of God, or any Part or Passage of it; *yet it is not lawful to hinder any Man, whether learned or unlearned, from reading, or hearing the Holy Scriptures read, in such a Language as he Understands.* For since every Man ought to have some good Reason that he may satisfy his Conscience of the Truth of that Profession, in and by which he hopes to be saved, and therefore must not take his Religion upon Trust on the Credit of any Man, or Church whatsoever; but is bound to make the best use he can of that Understanding that God has given him in the search of it; (as I think has already been sufficiently proved) it will follow that no man ought to be debarred from the use of any Means that he shall think necessary or proper to make use of in an Enquiry of such vast Importance to him; every Man indeed is bound in Charity (as he has Ability and Opportunity for it) to advise and admonish his Neighbour the best he can, for his Soul's good: Nor do I doubt but that, in some Cases, human Laws may justly be enacted by proper Penalties, to restrain Men from *teaching, or propagating* some sort of Opinions or Doctrines: But if a Man gives sufficient Security that he will not disturb or corrupt the Publick with his private Thoughts or Errors, and desires no more but that he may not be hindred from finding out the surest way he can for *himself* to go to Heaven; who has any Warrant or Authority from God by *force* to restrain or thwart him in such a Resolution.

Let us then suppose the very worst; which is that ignorant Men will not oftentimes be content to dwell upon those Passages of Holy Scriptures,
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that are most plain as well as instructive; but are curious and prying into the most obscure parts of it: Which (notwithstanding all the Caution and Advice that is given them by their Teachers) many of them will misinterpret; and *wrest* not only them, but *the other Scriptures also to their own Destruction*, 2 Pet. 3. 16. Let us suppose all this, I say, and then consider what will follow.

Because many ignorant Men will probably make an ill use of the very Means of Instruction that God in his Providence has provided for all Mankind, and exposed indifferently to the View and Use of all that will have recourse thereto; does this give sufficient Authority to the Governours of any Church, under severe Penalties, to withhold these Means from *all* that are of that sort; and thereby to keep them, most certainly, in greater Ignorance than otherwise they would be?

I (for Example) am a Man of little Knowledge, and a slender Capacity; yet sensible of the Obligation that lies upon me to seek for what Instruction I can in Religion, in order to my eternal Salvation. I am (suppose) in a good measure convinced that that Religion which was taught by Jesus Christ and his Apostles, is the true Religion; but (amongst the many Disputes that are in the World) am at a loss to know what are the genuine Doctrines of Faith, and Rules of Life that go to make up the whole System of it; now all who call themselves Christians being agreed in this, that the Holy Scriptures, if rightly understood, would give me great (and, as some hold, full and sufficient) Information in what I desire to learn; I would willingly set my self to read, and study them the best I can, in my own Mother Tongue, into which I understand they have been several times translated. No, say the Divines of the Church
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of *Rome*, you are an *unlearned Man*; and therefore in all probability will very much misinterpret the Holy Scriptures. But have not very many *learned Men* also most grossly misinterpreted these sacred Writings? And why then should such as they be permitted to read them? But what other and better way must I take, to be well convinced and satisfied touching the genuine Doctrines and Precepts of Christianity? Why, say they, rely upon the Authority of the Church. But I have just now shewn that they are altogether in an Error, who build their Faith upon the Credit and Authority of the Church of *Rome*; and the same Reason would hold as well against any other Church, that in this manner should attempt to impose a Religion upon me: Neither am I in this Matter to depend upon the Credit of my Parents, Kinsfolks, or Country; but must have some better Ground of satisfying my Conscience, as I have already proved: And what better Ground of Satisfaction in this Case I can have, than to search and enquire the best I can into the true Meaning of so much of the Holy Scriptures, as I am able, with what Helps are in my Power, to attain unto, I confess is beyond my Conception or Imagination.

I therefore conclude, That no Man ought to be debarred from reading or studying the best he can, the Holy Scriptures in any Language that he understands. I grant that he may err in the Interpretation of them; and if his Error be occasioned by any fault of his own, it is only at his own peril; if not, I cannot but think that God, who is gracious, will be merciful to him on that account: But if not content to enjoy the Freedom of his own Conscience, he endeavours to propagate his false Opinions, and thereby is the Cause

Cause of Disturbance in the World; there may be proper and legal ways of restraining and punishing of him, according to the Nature and Demerit of his Crime.

St. Peter, we find, was very well aware that they who were not only *unlearned*, but also *unstable*, were very apt to wrest not only the difficult Passages in St. Paul's Epistles, but also the other Scriptures, unto their own destruction, 2 Pet. 3. 16. Now if the Consequence from hence were, that therefore such Persons should not read the Scriptures at all, I cannot but think that he would have given some Intimation of a matter of so great Importance: Whereas the only Inference which he draws in the following Words, is, that Men should be cautious, (and that at their own peril) what Doctrines or Sentiments they entertain: *Ye therefore beloved (says he) seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye also being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness, ch. 17.*

And if it be a good Argument that *unlearned* Men ought not to study the Scriptures, because we find that they often misunderstand them; whereby they can do little Hurt, but only to themselves alone, it will hold much better against those that are *learned*: Experience having abundantly assured us, that many of them have not only misinterpreted the Text, but also by their Art and Eloquence, often drawn away multitudes of People to embrace their Errors.

§. XII. *Sixthly*, (and that I may now at last come Home to ourselves) From what has been said it will appear, how happy we of the Established Church are (or may be, if the Fault be not our own) not only in that every one amongst us has full and free Liberty to make all the En-

Enquiry he can into the Grounds and Reasons of his Religion ; but also, and chiefly, that there is no part of our Religion, nor any thing by our Church required from any Member of it, but will fairly and fully bear the Test of the most rational Disquisition ; so that every Man of us, that will but be at a little pains to make the Enquiry, may very soon not only satisfy his own Conscience why he is and ought to be of our Communion, but also be able (as my Text requires) to give a sufficient Answer to every other Man, that asketh him a Reason of the Hope that is in him.

And because this is a matter of very great Importance to us all, I shall spend the remaining part of this Discourse in shewing upon what solid and satisfactory Grounds it is, that we expect eternal Salvation, in the Profession and Practice of that Religion which by Law is Established amongst us; and that in such a manner, as I think may abundantly convince every Man that is sober and impartial in this Enquiry: In order whereunto it is most proper to observe, that if any Man ask *why we hope to be saved in our Church and Religion*; his Demand will in effect include these four Questions.

First, Why we are of any Religion at all, and not either downright *Atheists*, who deny the very Being of God; or *Epicureans*, whose Principles lay no Foundation for any Worship to be paid to him?

Secondly, Why we embrace the *Christian Religion*, and are neither *Jews*, *Mahometans*, nor *Heathens*?

Thirdly, Whereas the grand Division of Christians, in these Parts of the World, is into those of the *Church of Rome*, and those of the *Reformed*

or

SECT. XIII. *by the Test of Reason.* 27

or *Protestant Church*; Why we are *Protestants* and not *Papists*; of the *Reformed* rather than the *Roman Religion*?

Fourthly and lastly, Since there are some Divisions even amongst *Protestants* themselves, it may reasonably be required that we should shew, why we are *Protestants* of our *Established Church*, and not of any Party that dissents or divides from her?

To which four Questions if we return such plain and solid Answers, as may easily be understood, and are sufficient to give full Satisfaction to every Man of common Sense and Understanding; nothing I think will be wanting for the full Performance of what I have shewn my Text requires from every Christian: And altho' to do any tolerable Justice to each of these Points, would require rather a Volume than only a part of a short Discourse, yet, such is the native Light of Truth, that I doubt not, with God's Blessing, but by briefly proposing some of the chief Heads or Topicks of what has often been, and may much more largely be said upon them, I shall either give good Satisfaction to every reasonable Man, or at least put him in the way of farther satisfying himself, if he will but be at the pains of a sober and diligent Enquiry into the matter.

§. XIII. First then we are to consider why we are of any Religion at all, and not *Atheists* or *Epicureans*.

However difficult the very Notion of *Eternity* may appear to our finite and narrow Understanding, yet is it plain, even to Demonstration, that of necessity there must be an eternal Being, which never had a beginning. For if we could suppose but one single Instant in which nothing

at all did exist; since from no Cause no Effect can follow, the Consequence unavoidably must be, that nothing could ever be produced into Existence. It follows then, that either the World itself must be eternal, or else, that there is some eternal, original Cause of it.

I grant indeed that whichsoever of these Opinions we hold, we are equally attended with this difficulty, That *the Understanding of Man being finite and limited, cannot frame a clear and comprehensive Notion of [Eternity, which is] a Thing unlimited and infinite*: And yet notwithstanding this, That either the World is eternal, or that there is some eternal Cause of it, is, as I have shewn, no less than demonstrable: One side or other of the Disjunction must of necessity be taken; and a Difficulty that equally presses upon both Parts, cannot justly be made an Argument against either. A prudent Man therefore ought to look farther, and thoroughly consider what Difficulties more there may be, which arise upon one side of the Question, but are fairly avoided on the other; and where he finds the least and the fewest, there he will fix and determine his Judgment.

As to the Eternity of the World, take it which way you will, it involves such Difficulties or rather Absurdities, as are neither to be avoided nor digested.

If you say that the *Matter* of the World, having for numberless Ages lain quiet and altogether without Motion, at last began to move: It is absurd to imagine that *Matter* (which of it self is supposed to be an inert and unactive Being) after having lain from all Eternity in an universal State of Quiet and Non-motion, should at last, without any other efficient Cause *but it self*, pass into a State of Motion and Activity.

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If you say that the Motion of Matter was eternal, and that by continual Motion it at last, without any Contriver but meer Chance, fell of it self into that regular Order, which for so many Years it has been found exactly and uniformly to have kept, (to say nothing of the great Absurdity of ascribing an *eternal* Property to Matter, [*viz.* Motion] which by all is allowed not to be *natural* or *essential* to it) this is altogether as foolish as to imagine, that a great quantity of Brass and Iron being melted together in a Cauldron, and violently stirred about, should, in process of time, frame it self into Springs, Wheels, &c. and put it self together into a most curious Clock, with all imaginable Variety as well as Regularity of Motions, and of it self should go for above five thousand Years, without ever erring so much as one single Minute, or any the least appearance that ever it is like to be out of order: Or, that a blind Man, who knew nothing of Letters, nor understood a Word of Greek, might yet, by often moving a Pen at random upon Paper, at last write such a Poem as *Homer's Iliads*, without making a false Quantity or misplacing so much as an Accent.

Or, lastly, If you shall say that the World, in the same Manner and Posture that now it exists, has always and for ever been: Since *unthinking Necessity* is altogether as blind as *Chance* it self; the same Absurdity that I have last represented to overthrow the Opinion of the World's being made by *Chance*, will here again take place; and may as effectually be urged, as it was in the other Case. And besides this, the Eternity of the World this way stated, necessarily implies an *eternal Succession* of each particular kind of Animals and Vegetables, as well as of Days and
C 3 Years;

Years; and such an eternal Succession, as necessarily implies *a number actually infinite*: For if (for Example) there has been an eternal Succession of *Men* in the World; the *number* of all those who have been alive and are now dead, taken together, must be *actually infinite*. And yet an *eternal Succession* of Things without any beginning, or a *number actually infinite*, is to me as plain and palpable a Contradiction, as any that can be imagined: There being no number whatever, but what by the accession of more Particulars, may become bigger; and more Days and Nights having passed; and more Men been born into and dyed out of the World by this time, than what had been a Year or two ago: Nor can we imagine, but whatsoever has had an *end*, (as all the past Generations of Men have had, and this must soon have) must of necessity also have had a *beginning*.

These things being duly considered, I cannot imagine how the Eternity of the World can in any sense be allowed of or admitted. Let us pass then to the other part of the Disjunction, and see whether the same Difficulties, or any that are equal to them, do arise upon this also.

They who assert, That this World had a *beginning*, but that there is an *eternal* original Cause of it; do maintain, That as this Cause is an intelligent Being, so is it altogether unchangeable, and in its very nature incapable of any Alteration or Succession. Whatsoever therefore it willed or decreed, it did it from all Eternity, altho' the outward visible *Effect* of such Will or Decree might be of such a nature, as to be incapable of being eternal, and consequently must have a *beginning* of its actual Existence. Now here again we meet that common Difficulty which I first mentioned;

viz.

Sect. XIII. *By the Test of Reason.* 31

viz. That the Understanding of Man being finite and limited, cannot frame a clear and comprehensive Notion of [Eternity, which is] a Thing unlimited and infinite. But this Difficulty being (as I have already said) to be wholly laid aside, because it equally presses upon both Parts of the Disjunction, there is none other that arises or occurs, to be made an Objection against the Doctrine.

A spontaneous beginning of Motion in an eternal, unactive Being; eternal Motion, and yet not natural or essential to the thing moved; the most curious and regular Contrivance, and yet to be the Effect of blind Chance or fatal Necessity, which is equally blind; eternal Succession without a beginning; a number actually infinite: All these, I say, which affect one side of the Question only, are most gross and manifest Absurdities. But the eternal Existence of an immutable Being, without any manner of Change or Succession, which is the only Objection against the other side, has no other Difficulty in it, but what equally presses upon both Parts; *viz.* That the very Notion of Eternity, is too big for the human Understanding.

Add to all this, that not only the History written by *Moses*, but all others that trace things backward to the most remote Antiquity; do unanimously concur in such an Account of the Original of Nations, and the gradual Plantation of the several Parts of the Earth, (some of which, tho' commodiously capable of Inhabitants, are yet to this Day uninhabited) as plainly shews, that the Tradition universally received among Mankind was always this, That the World was not eternal, but had a beginning.

But because some Men are obstinate, in adhering to an Opinion which they have once entertained, whatever Arguments are, or may be brought

brought against it; let us suppose (notwithstanding all that has been said) that the World might possibly have been from all Eternity: Yet still, if both in the whole, and every particular part of it, there appears to be all the *Design* and *Contrivance* that can well be imagined, it must of necessity follow that there is some eternal *Contriver*, which in *Nature*, if not in *Order of Time*, is the original and first Cause of it: It being (as I have already said) equally absurd to imagine, that the most exact and regular *Design* and *Contrivance*, should be the effect either of blind *Chance*, or *unthinking fatal* Necessity.

And if this same *first and original Cause* can, beyond all Exception, be proved to be most powerful, wise and good; then the being of a God is clearly and fully demonstrated.

Let us then but take a View of the Structure of the Universe, as far as it is or may be the Object of our Sense, or Knowledge; let us consider all the several Parts, that go to make up the whole Composition; together with their various Operations, Motions, and mutual Relations one to another; the Sun, the Moon, the Stars and Planets, which in a due measure shed their comfortable Light, Heat and Influence, upon us and our Habitation here below; and by the constant Regularity of their Motions, distinguish and mark out unto us the Day for Labour, the Night for Rest, and the several Seasons of the Year for the Production, Ripening and Gathering in the Fruits of the Earth; without which it were impossible, by the Course of Nature, that living Creatures should subsist; the Fire, the Air, the Earth, the Water; the Ebbing and Flowing of the Sea; the Dew, the Rain, the Fountains and Rivers; the great Variety of Trees, Herbs, and all sorts of
Fruits

Fruits and Vegetables, which the Earth produces and propagates; some for Food, some for Medicine, and some for Delight: All the several sorts of Animals in the Earth, and the Water; with the admirable Structure of their several Bodies, according to the Place or Element wherein they have their different Abode or Habitation; and the several Senses and various Instincts implanted in them, whereby they are enabled to preserve themselves, and also continue their proper and respective Kinds or Species: And lastly *Man*, the Lord of this inferiour World; his Body framed in a wonderful manner, and his Mind endowed with the noble Powers and Faculties of Understanding, Will, and Memory, far beyond any other earthly Creature whatsoever: Whereby he is enabled to distinguish between not only sensible, but also rational Good and Evil, to pursue the one and avoid the other; and not only each Man to preserve and provide for himself, but also in some measure to promote the general Comfort and Happiness of all Mankind. Let us, I say, thoroughly consider all these things, and farther subdivide them into as many Particulars, as our own Thoughts and Observation will easily suggest unto us; and then demand, Can any thing be a greater Argument of *Power*, than this vast and stupendous Fabrick (the Extent of which is unknown to us) is of his, that first made and still supports it? Can any thing be a greater Demonstration of *Wisdom*, than its Beauty, Order, and the mutual Correspondence of its several Parts, are of his, who thus has contrived it? And, lastly, is not the great Usefulness of all its Parts, (which more and more we every Day discover) in order to the several Ends for which they are evidently framed, an abundant Argument that
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the Author and Maker of it is a Being of the greatest *Goodness* and Beneficence, in that he has thus provided not only for the Being, but also for the Well-being of all his Creatures, according to their several Capacities? He, that can deny, or but entertain a doubt of any of these things, must certainly be void of all serious Thought and Consideration; and consequently we may, with holy *David*, most certainly pronounce him to be a *Fool*, who dares, but even in his Heart, to say that there is no God, *Pf. 14. 1.* And since the whole course of the Universe, and all that appears, or can be so much as imagined in it, may altogether as well be accounted for upon the Supposition of one only God, as of many; and Beings are not in our own Fancy to be multiplied without any manner of Cause or Reason for it; it will follow, that sober Reason would of it self conclude for the *Unity* of the Divine Nature, altho' Revelation (the Certainty of which I shall presently prove) had not given us such farther Assurance, as it has, that there is but *one God*.

And if once the Being of God, as the Author and Contriver of this whole World and every thing in it, be thus beyond all Contradiction established; the Relation which we, as his Creatures, bear unto him, and the constant Dependence which of Necessity we always must have upon him, do so plainly infer an Obligation upon us (as we are rational, and also endowed with Freedom of Will and a Power of Election) always to honour, worship and obey him, as far as we can any way come to the Knowledge of his Will and Pleasure, that I need not offer any thing farther for the Proof of it: And this I take to be a sufficient Answer to the first Question; namely,

namely, *Why we are of any Religion at all, and not downright Atheists or Epicureans?*

§. XIV. But this Answer will receive a new and farther Confirmation, from that which we have to make to the second Question that comes next to be considered; namely, *Why we do embrace the Christian Religion, and are neither Jews, Mahometans, nor Heathens?*

To this our Answer is, That we are Christians, (and of no other Religion) because *Christianity is from God*; and if we can make this Assertion good, it not only shews the Obligation that lies upon us to be of this Religion rather than of any other, but also is a farther Proof of the being of God, and consequently of the Necessity of Religion in the general.

Now, to prove Christianity to be from God, or, in other terms, that God is the Author of it, we principally insist upon four Arguments; the first drawn from its own intrinsic Wisdom and Goodness; the second from Prophecies; the third from Miracles; and the fourth from the great Success which this Religion met with at its first appearance in the World. Which four things, taken all together, we judge abundantly sufficient to establish the main Conclusion.

§. XV. As to the first of these; if we allow God to be the first and original Cause of all things, and at the same time to be most wise and good, as from his Works has been already shewn; the Consequence must be, That whatever Doctrine, Discipline or Institution, contains or carries in it self the most consummate Goodness and Wisdom, that such a Thing is capable of; and has nothing in its Contrivance but what is both wise and good; may well be ascribed to God (who is the Fountain of all Wisdom and Goodness) as its
mediate

mediate or immediate Author: And as whatever tends to the advancing and promoting both the Honour and Glory of the Creator, and the common Welfare and Happiness of the Creature, is by all Men allowed to be good? so if it be as well fitted and contrived as may be, in order to the compassing of so noble an End; it must be looked upon as having all the Marks and Tokens of *Wisdom*, as well as *Goodness*, of which it is or can be capable.

Let us then take but a transient View of Christianity, and we shall immediately find that it gives us the highest and most exalted Notion of God that we are capable of receiving; it teaches us to look upon him as a Being most absolutely perfect in all respects; a Spirit infinitely Wise, Powerful, Just and Merciful; *the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the blessed and only Potentate, King of Kings and Lord of Lords; who only hath immortality, dwelling in the Light which no Man can approach unto, whom no Man hath seen, nor can see, 1 Tim. i. 17. and 6. 15, 16.* In a Word, whatever is great, good or glorious, far beyond the comprehension or shallow Imagination of Man, is all in the highest Degree taught and proclaimed, throughout the Holy Scriptures, of God the Creator of Heaven and Earth; and all Christians are thereby taught and commanded to give Honour, Glory, Praise and Adoration, with all their Powers and Faculties, accordingly to him.

Again, If any thing can tend to the general Happiness of Mankind here, and qualifie them for that which is future in Heaven hereafter; it must be universal Piety, Truth, Justice, Charity, Humility, Sobriety, Temperance, and whatever else is necessary to raise their Minds above those little and unworthy Ends which worldly Men propose to

to themselves, and which are the Cause of so much Contention and Confusion here, and (as all Religions do teach) of intolerable Punishment and Misery hereafter; and that all these things, in the very utmost Degree, are taught, expressed, and most strictly required by the Christian Religion, without the least Allowance or Mixture of any thing that is evil or impure; a very little acquaintance with the new Testament will soon inform us.

And, *Lastly*, If any thing can, at the same time, secure our everlasting Happiness in Heaven hereafter, and also add something to that of those blessed and immortal Spirits who there already enjoy the beatifick Presence of God; it must be that we, (*Luke* 15. 10.) who are Sinners, and thereby have incurred God's Wrath; are admitted to Repentance, and a Possibility of Pardon and Reconciliation, upon such Terms as are neither inconsistent with any of God's Attributes, on the one hand, nor impossible or impracticable to us, on the other: And how well the Gospel is calculated for this Purpose, when it teaches us that *Christ dyed for our Sins*; *1 Cor.* 15. 3. *that Repentance and Remission of Sins should be preached in his Name among all Nations*, *Luke* 24. 47. and that *God will give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him*, *Luke* 11. 13. with a great deal more of the same import; will soon be obvious to every one, who sets himself but a little seriously to consider it.

It would far exceed the designed Proportion of this Part of my Discourse; should I proceed to consider the several and particular Doctrines and Rules of Christianity, and farther to shew the great Wisdom and Goodness of God that appears in all and each of them. But if we can but suppose that any Religion whatever, may be worthy
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of, and agreeable to the infinite Perfections of the Divine Majesty, there certainly is nothing wanting in that which was taught by Christ and his Apostles, to raise it completely up to that Character; and this is the first Argument which we urge to prove that Christianity is from God; namely, the intrinsic Wisdom and Goodness of the Religion it self. I proceed to the

§. XVI. Second, which is drawn from *Prophecies*; whereby this Truth is farther confirmed.

That the whole Body of the Jewish Nation have, for above these seventeen hundred Years past, been in constant Expectation of the appearance of an extraordinary Person, to be sent by God into the World, under the Title of *Christ* or the *Messiah*, is what they themselves own, and no Man does or can deny: And this very Expectation sufficiently shews, that some Predictions or *Prophecies* (whether true or false) there have been, that such a Person was to come; for if no one had ever pretended to foretel any such thing, what could possibly raise such an universal Imagination, and that for so many Years, in such a vast Multitude of People? It is not now my Design to enter into a particular Examination of all these Prophecies: But if all the most eminent and remarkable Ones of them, are clearly and conspicuously fulfilled, in the Person of our Blessed Lord and Saviour Jesus, and there is not so much as one of all those ancient Predictions, that was ever by the Jews themselves interpreted of the Messiah, but what is fairly fulfilled and accomplished in him; this will at the same time shew, that these were real Prophecies, and not Figments; and that Jesus Christ, whom we own and receive, is really and truly the Person prophesied of: And since it is allowed on all hands,

hands, that none but God can foretel such things as are in themselves contingent, at any considerable distance of time before they come to pass; the Consequence must be, that Jesus is that Messiah, whom God did long since promise to send into the World; and consequently, that the Doctrine and Religion which he taught, is from God himself.

Now, the most remarkable Prophecies, or some of them at least, of ancient Record in the *Old Testament*, and generally understood to be meant of the Messiah, are these; That he should be the *Seed of the Woman*; That he should *bruise the Serpent's Head*, and have his *Heel bruised* by him, *Gen. 3. 15.* That he should be the *Seed of Abraham*; and that in him all the Nations of the Earth should be blessed, *Gen. 22. 18.* That the *Scepter* should not depart from *Judah*, nor a *Lawgiver* from between his feet, until he should come; and that unto him should the gathering of the People be, *Gen. 49. 10.* That he should be a *Prophet* like unto *Moses*; raised up among the people to speak the words that God should put into his mouth; and that whosoever of the people of *Israel* should not hearken to his words, God would require it of them, *Deut. 18. 18, 19.* That he should be from the root of *Jesse*, (who was the Father of King *David*;) that he should stand for an *Ensign* of the people, to which the *Gentiles* should seek, and that his *Rest* should be glorious, *Is. 11. 10.* That the government should be upon his shoulders; that his name should be called, *Wonderful, Counsellour, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace*: Of the increase of whose government and peace there should be no end, upon the throne of *David*, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice, from henceforth even for ever, *Is. 9. 6, 7.* That he should be conceived and
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born of a Virgin, and called Immanuel; (which signifies God with us) If. 7. 14. Mat. 1. 23. That he should be despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: That he should bear our griefs and carry our sorrows, be wounded for our transgressions; and that with his stripes we should be healed, the Lord laying on him the iniquity of us all, If. 53. 3, &c. with more to this purpose in the same Chapter, That he should come within a certain number of Years, foretold by the Prophet Daniel, (Dan. 9. 24, &c.) and be cut off, but not for himself; after which the city and the sanctuary should be destroyed, and the sacrifice and oblation should cease. These, I say, (with divers others that may be reckoned up) are remarkable Prophecies concerning the Messiah, recorded in the Old Testament many Centuries of Years before our Blessed Saviour's appearance in this World: To which also may be added a great number of other Passages, which by the Jews themselves have always been looked upon as pointing, some of them prophetically, and others typically, to the same Person: Insomuch that, to this very Day, there is no Opinion that more strongly possesses the Minds of all that People than this; That the Messiah, whom God long since promised, and whom they suppose not yet to be come; shall in due time come and appear in the World.

Now whatever Difficulties may seem to arise in the Interpretation of all, or any of these, either typical or prophetical Passages, there is one very fair and reasonable Key to be made use of, which immediately opens and solves them all; which is, That the Kingdom of the Messiah, to which God requires all Mankind to be subject, is not a temporal but a spiritual Kingdom, John 18. 36. and therefore that all such Passages as relate to him,

him, and are not capable of a literal Interpretation, are to be understood in a spiritual Sense: Let us take, I say, but this one easy and rational Supposition with us, and the whole System of Types and Prophecies that occur in the Old Testament, concerning the Messiah, will easily and fairly be cleared up by it.

Thus, for Example; Altho' in a strict literal Sense it cannot be said, That our Blessed Saviour *sate upon the throne of David, and upon his Kingdom, to order it*, Is. 9. 7. because he was no temporal Prince, as the other in his time had been; yet is it a sufficient fulfilling of this part of that Prophecy, that he, who in his human Nature was both the legal and natural Son of *David*, was appointed as a spiritual King for ever, to rule over the People of God. Thus also, tho' literally he might be called the *Seed of the Woman*, Gen. 3. 15. because he was conceived and born of a pure Virgin; yet his *bruising of the Serpent's Head and the Serpent's* bruising his Heel, is mystically to be understood of his *destroying the works of the Devil*, John 3. 8. and of the Sufferings and Temptations wherewith the Devil assaulted him, and continues to do the like more or less, to all Christians, who are the Members of his mystical Body *the Church*. And after the same manner all other the like Difficulties, that any where occur in the Prophecies concerning the Messiah, may, I think, most easily and fairly be solved; as will abundantly appear to every one who seriously and impartially compares them all, with the History of our Blessed Saviour's Conception, Birth, Life, Death, Resurrection, and Ascension into Heaven; together with the Descent of the Holy Ghost upon his Apostles and Disciples, and the consequent

Propagation of the Gospel throughout all the known Parts of the World.

I need not therefore so far enlarge this Discourse as to go through the Particulars of these Types and Prophecies, and shew, how that very many of them are *literally*, the rest of them *spiritually*, and all of them *fairly* and *rationaly* accomplished in our Blessed Lord and Saviour Jesus : But, taking the Sum of the Argument together, I think it must have very great Force upon all unprejudic'd Minds, if we thus put it into form.

A great number of Types, Prefigurations and Prophecies, in several and distant Ages ; some of them very plain, and all of them so pointing one way, as to beget in the whole Nation of the Jews, an Expectation of the coming of a Messiah ; and lastly, all of them in due time fairly and coherently fulfilled, in one and the same Person ; all this, I say, could be the Effect of no other Wisdom or Foresight, but that of God ; and consequently the Person in whom all these were fulfilled, ought to be looked upon as that very Messiah, who was promised, and accordingly sent by God into the World.

But all this is come to pass in the Person of our Blessed Lord and Saviour Jesus.

Therefore he is the Messiah or Christ, who was promised, and accordingly sent into the World by God. And if thus much is once granted, the Consequence will not be denied, That therefore that Religion, which was taught by himself in person, and afterwards by those who were commissioned by him, is to be looked upon as coming from God and of Divine Authority ; and thus much for the second Argument, whereby we prove the Christian Religion to be from God : I proceed to the

§. XVII. Third, which is drawn from the many *Miracles* that have been wrought for the Confirmation of it.

Whoever acknowledges God to be the first Cause and Creator of all Things, can mean no more by this Word *Nature*, when applied to created Beings, but only those Attributes and Qualifications, together with that Force and Energy, wherewith God has endowed them, and each of them: And thus it is the *Nature* of each thing, to do or to bear, whatever God has fitted and appointed it for.

How far the *Power of Nature* extends; or (in other terms) what Attributes, Qualifications, Force or Energy, God, who is Almighty, can, if he so pleases, bestow upon any created Being, I take it for granted that no Man knows: But how far the ordinary *Course of Nature* goes; that is to say, what is the state and condition of Things, as far as they appear to us; what are the common Effects of such and such Causes, and the usual Causes of such and such Effects; We all of us in a very great Measure do know, and every Day learn from our constant Experience and Observation.

If then I should see a Cause, duly applied, and yet not produce its usual Effect, or an Effect produced by a Cause in all appearance unsuitable to it; altho' I should not say this is altogether beyond the *Power of Nature*, (which in one Sense is no other than the *Power of God*, to whom all things, that do not imply a Contradiction, are possible) yet I very well might say, this is beyond that *ordinary Course of Nature*, which by my constant Experience I find that God has established in the World; and such a thing I should call by the Name of a *Wonder*.

Again, If a rational Agent should bring about any Effect, in outward appearance different from the ordinary Course of Nature; but yet (as I should apprehend) did perform this by some secret Method of applying such Causes, as in the common Nature of things were proper, and of Force sufficient for such a production; this I should call the *Power of Art*.

But if such an Agent should *knowingly* and *designedly* do any thing, in order to produce any remarkable Effect; and accordingly should thereby produce it, without the least ground to suspect or imagine the intervention of any such sort of *natural Cause*; such a Work as this so performed, is what I call by the Name of a *Miracle*.

There may, I grant, be divers Cases, wherein a Man may very much doubt, and perhaps not be well able to determine, whether such or such a Work be a *Miracle*, or whether it be performed by the *Power of Art*: But other Instances again may be supposed, which, if appearing to be true in fact, no Man in his Wits can doubt to be really and truly *Miracles*. For Example; Let us suppose a number of Men, some blind, others lame, maimed, sick of several sorts of Diseases, or plainly possessed by evil Spirits speaking within them, and violently distorting their Bodies with convulsive Motions; and that all these should be healed and cured of their several Maladies, by a Touch only, or barely by a Word speaking; could any Man be so extravagant as to say, that all this might possibly be performed by some *secret Art*, whereby a Man might be enabled to apply proper *natural Causes*, (in the common acceptation of that Expression) sufficient to the production of these Effects? Suppose five or seven Loaves, of a common bigness, to be broken
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Sect. XVII. *by the Test of Reason.* 45

and distributed among four or five Thousand hungry Men, and to give them all a full Meal; and even the Fragments that remained, to be more in quantity than the Loaves themselves were: Or, lastly, to omit other Instances; Suppose one Man to be dead, and carrying to his buryal; another to have lain four Days in his Grave; and a third to have been crucified, and a Spear thrust into his very Entrails, and then to have lain in the Sepulchre to the third Day; and all of these to have been raised again, and actually restored to Life: If a Man should allow the Facts to be true, and yet deny them to be *miraculous*, in the Sence that I have now explained the Word, the whole World certainly would look upon him to be most unreasonably obstinate.

If *Miracles* were really wrought, and urged for the confirmation of any Doctrine, which my Reason most plainly assured me implied a contradiction, or were unworthy of God, and not to be reconciled with his known Attributes; such a Doctrine as this, I could not believe or give my assent to, whatever were done or pretended to be done, for the Establishing of it. For to give assent at the same time to Contradictions, is absolutely impossible; and since our Reason assures us, That GOD, who is Eternal, Immortal, and absolutely Perfect, is therefore altogether Unchangable; it must follow, that whatever is contrary to any of his Attributes, must of necessity imply a contradiction: And therefore when I had made the utmost Enquiry I could into such Miracles as these, if I were not able to detect them of *Art*, or *Imposure*, I could only look upon them as wrought by some evil Spirit, (*Deut. 13. 3. Mat. 24. 24.*) and permitted by God, as a Tryal of our Faith and Adherence to him. But if upon the strictest Examination,

nation, the Doctrine, however above the reach of my Understanding to comprehend, should appear to have nothing *contradictory*, either in it or consequent from it, nor to contain or imply any thing; that were contrary to what I believe of God; and the Miracles wrought for the confirmation of it, were really and truly such, as they were pretended to be; such a Doctrine as this I should look upon, as having all the Evidence of Divine Authority that could be desired: Nor could I apprehend, for what other reason God, in such a Case as this, should work Miracles or cause them to be wrought, but only in order to beget in Men a firm Belief of such Doctrine. If God by a Voice from Heaven should tell me, that such a Doctrine were true; this would be no more but a *Miracle*; and every other Miracle, in the Case supposed, would appear to me to be as full an Attestation from him, who is the Author and Controller of *Nature*, and without whose Power or particular Permission, the *Course* of it cannot at any time be altered.

Now take the whole System of Christian *Doctrine*, (not as it is altered or corrupted by this or that Sect or Party, but) as it is delivered to us pure and unmixed in the Scriptures; and altho' there may be some things obscure and above the reach of our Understanding; yet is there nothing in it that can be pretended to imply a *Contradiction*; and that the whole Frame of it is altogether worthy of God, and agreeable to his Attributes, I have already sufficiently shewn from the intrinsic Wisdom and Goodness that appears to be in it; and therefore since so many *Miracles* (in the proper Acceptation of that Word) were wrought by our Saviour Jesus Christ, his Apostles and Disciples for the Confirmation of this Doctrine (as must be evident to every

SECT. XVII. *by the Test of Reason.* 47

every one who reads the four *Gospels* and the *Acts of the Apostles*) it unquestionably must follow, from what has been said, that the Doctrine it self is from God, and that he is the Author and Approver of it.

And if any one shall question the Truth of these Matters of Fact, or doubt whether they were performed according as they are recorded in the History of the *New Testament*; for his Conviction I need only appeal to the many and great Sufferings of the Apostles and Disciples of Christ (many of whom were *Eye-witnesses* of all that was done; and others received the Relation from their concurrent Testimony) who continually exposed themselves (as is most notorious and undenied) to all manner of Persecutions and Torments, and even to Death it self, only upon the Account of this same Testimony which they gave to the Resurrection of Christ, and all other the Miracles which were wrought by him and his Disciples for the Confirmation of that Doctrine and Religion which they taught and preached: And that such great Numbers of Men should readily undergo so many great and bitter Sufferings, without either inquiring into, or being well assured of the Facts upon which all they suffered for intirely depended, is a thing in it self, altogether incredible.

Some, who are obstinate, will perhaps say, that if *Christianity* may be proved by Miracles, so may *Popery* too: For the Papists with great Assurance make that Plea, even for those Doctrines and Practices in particular whereby they are distinguished from other Christians: But (to say nothing yet a while of the monstrous Absurdities of Popery; which to an impartial Man must still appear very hard if not impossible to be digested, whatever Proof we may suppose them to have for their *Miracles*;

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to say nothing of this, I say) between the Miracles that were wrought for the establishing of Christianity and those which the Church of Rome alledges in behalf of her peculiar Tenets, there are these four very remarkable Differences.

First, The Christian Miracles are all of them grave and serious; the Popish ones generally are trifling and childish; as will abundantly appear to every one who compares the four *Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles* with the *Legends and Lives* of the [pretended] Saints received in the Church of Rome.

Secondly, The Christian Miracles were immediately published to the World, as soon as they were wrought; whereby all Men had an Opportunity of making a full and impartial Inquiry into the Truth and Reality of them; whereas the most considerable of the Popish ones have scarce ever been mentioned, until some Generations after the Time that they are pretended to have been performed.

Thirdly, The Christian Miracles were immediately and publickly attested by a sufficient Number of Witnesses; all of them Men of great Honesty and Simplicity; who neither would nor could have contrived such a Forgery; by which (if a Forgery it were) they could not have the least Prospect of Advantage, but altogether of great and grievous Sufferings. Whereas the Popish Miracles have seldom been published until long after the Death of the pretended Witnesses; and even those Witnesses such as were no Sufferers, but Gainers by their Testimony, and therefore, for that as well as other Reasons, the more liable to be suspected.

Fourthly, So convincing was the Evidence, which every where was offered for the Christian Miracles, that

that they almost universally gained belief, even from Enemies as well as Friends; nor did any of those who antiently opposed our Religion, deny or gainsay the Matters of Fact; but only endeavoured to bring other Solutions for the Argument which the primitive Christians brought from that Topick; whereas the Popish Miracles have been so far from gaining Credit (even in point of Fact) among their Adversaries; that their own sober and learned Men, do not appear to believe the truth of much the greatest Part of them.

Let these four things then (in themselves sufficiently notorious, and which my intended Brevity will not allow me to enlarge upon) be thoroughly and seriously considered; and it will soon appear that altho' the Argument from Miracles holds strongly and unanswerably in the behalf of Christianity; yet nothing can fairly be drawn from the like Topick for the Establishment of Popery.

§. XVIII. At last then I am come to the fourth Argument whereby we prove that Christianity is from God; and that is drawn from the great *Success* which it met with at its first Appearance in the World.

I grant indeed that *Success alone* is not sufficient to prove the Truth or Goodness of any Cause whatsoever: It being beyond Contradiction notorious, that Error and Villany have sometimes been very successful. But where a Religion has all other the Marks of Truth; and has with great Success been propagated, not only by Persons in an outward Appearance unfit for such a Work, and without the least Prospect of any temporal Encouragement; but also in opposition to many grievous and bitter Persecutions, by the greatest Powers upon Earth, universally raised against it: The very *Success*, I say, of such a Reli-

gion as this, adds no small Weight to the other Arguments, that are brought to prove the Divine Authority of it; and in such a Case, it may well be supposed that it is God, who gives Men Power to perform a Work to which of themselves they are altogether unequal; and when *vast Multitudes* every where not only forsake their old Religion in which they had been bred, and embrace this which is but newly preached amongst them; but also readily and willingly undergo Poverty, Banishment, Torments, and even Death it self for the sake of it; It may well be look't upon as a good Argument, not only of the strong and clear Conviction which they have of the Truth of it, but also of a more than ordinary support which they receive from the Hand of God, whereby they are enabled for its sake to bear such things as seem to surpass the very Strength of human Nature.

Now this is exactly the Case of Christianity: Its own intrinsick Wisdom and Goodness, together with the Prophecies accomplished, and Miracles wrought for its Establishment, do give it all the Marks of Truth, that can reasonably be desired; it was at first preached by Men, both poor, and illiterate all of them except *St. Paul*; and he too a Man but of a very small figure in proportion to so great a Work: And so far was it from meeting with any temporal Encouragement in the World; that for about three hundred Years together it was always discountenanced, and often most inhumanly persecuted by the Civil Powers: Yet still the more it was persecuted the more it prevailed; and the loss it sustained by the Death of every Martyr was doubly and trebly repaired by the new Converts that daily came over to it: Until at last, without any other visible

visible Force but that of constant Preaching and holy Living ; it triumphed over all the Opposition that was given to it, by the Learning of the Jewish Doctors and Heathen Philosophers; the Rage and Fury of the common People, and the Swords and Faggots, the Racks and Gibbets, and all other Instruments of Death that every where were prepared for it by the Power of the Civil Magistrate: nor could any thing stop its Progress until it got full and quiet Possession of all the vast Dominions of the *Roman* Empire, and carried its Conquests (how far indeed, for want of Records, we cannot certainly determine ; but) very much farther, we are sure, than ever the *Romans* were able to extend their Power. Now altho' we grant Success alone is not sufficient to prove the Truth of any Religion: yet such wonderful Success as this, in Conjunction with the other Arguments that I have mentioned, we take to be an abundant Proof that *Christianity is from God, and consequently is the true Religion.*

§. XIX. But there are some Difficulties that certain Men do start upon this Occasion ; to which it will here be expected that an Answer should be given.

*First, Since God is no respecter of Persons, Acts 10: 34. how comes it to pass that all Nations and People have not alike had the Gospel preached, and the Benefits of it thereby offered unto them ? Why did not the Apostles, or others sent by them, travel into every Part of the World alike ? Examine the Account that Ecclesiastical History gives us of the Progress of Christianity, and you will find that tho' in a few Years it prevailed very much almost throughout the *Roman* Empire ; yet many other Countries there were, that for divers Centuries heard little or nothing of it : Nor does it appear to this very Day to have been at all*

made known to the North-East Part of *Tartary* and great Part of *America*; and but very imperfectly in many vast Tracts of *India*, *China*, and the Countries thereunto near adjoining. Now if God Almighty designed Christianity for the common Benefit of all Mankind, and no Man can receive the Benefit of a Religion without some competent Knowledge of it; what imaginable Reason can be given why this Knowledge should not fairly be offered to every particular Man; and that in such a manner as to leave him no room to complain of any but himself: If, by not embracing of the Religion, he falls short of the Reward that it proposes to its Votaries and Professors?

Upon this Objection the Adversaries of Christianity lay no small Weight; and many weak Christians at the first are puzzled and perplexed at it: I have therefore concealed no part of the Strength of it; and do think that the Force of it will be wholly taken away if we duly consider these two things.

First, That it is no *Argument in the least to prove, that God has not done a thing, because we are not able to assign a Reason why he has not done more.* Why did not he, whose Wisdom and Power are infinite, create ten thousand Millions of Worlds? (And if he had done so, the Question might still as well be asked, Why did he not create ten times as many more?) We know not. But will it therefore follow, that he made never an one at all? Why did he not make this World much better than it is; and endow each particular Creature with greater Perfections than what they now have? (And whatever of this sort he had done, still the Question would recur, Why did he not do more?) Of this we are altogether ignorant: But will this, without more ado, overturn all the Arguments

Sect. XX. *by the Test of Reason.*

53

guments that are brought to prove, That the World was framed and fashioned by him? And because we know not why he did not think fit, either to send Christ sooner into the World, or to cause Christianity to be taught, as particularly to each Man every where, as Children at School do learn their Lessons; Will this destroy the Force of all or any of those Proofs, that are brought for the Truth and Divine Authority of that Religion? As far as an Argument concludes well, it ought to be received: But to reject what is solidly and substantially proved, only because something beyond that cannot be proved, or is not true, is altogether absurd and unreasonable.

But still you will say, Why should God punish Men for not being Christians, if the Gospel has either not at all, or not sufficiently been preached or proposed to them? I answer, That this is not the Reason why he will punish such Men: For (which is the

Second thing to be considered) no Truth can be more evident by its own Light than this, That *God, who is infinitely just, good and gracious, will never punish any Man for not doing an impossible thing*; and therefore tho' we know not how far, or for what several Reasons he may punish those, who never have had the Knowledge of the Gospel offered to them; yet to imagine that he will punish them, *for not being Christians*, is a palpable Mistake: It being altogether impossible for a Man to become a Christian, if no sufficient Instruction of that sort has ever been offered to him.

§. XX. Another Difficulty to be cleared up, is this; That many Men have in all Ages opposed Christianity, many have corrupted it; or great Disputes, at least, there have been, and still are, which are the true and genuine Doctrines and

Precepts of it; in many places where once it wholly prevailed, it has now lost its Ground, and given way to Mahometanism; and among those who profess it, vast Multitudes there are who lead their Lives almost in a direct opposition to it. Now, if the Evidence for this Religion has all along from the beginning, been so very great and clear, as I have endeavoured to represent it; how is it possible that so many Men did, and still do resist the Force of it, and choose another and far worse Profession before it? How could it come to be thus adulterated, as we find it is? (For among the many contending and contrary Parties, all but one must, more or less, be Corrupters of that Christianity which in common they pretend to.) And, lastly, If the Rewards it proposes, and Punishments it threatens, are so certain, as they must be, if the Religion it self be undoubtedly of Divine Authority; it seems to be beyond Imagination it self, that any one Man in his Wits should believe this, and yet continue to lead a wicked and ungodly Life.

In answer hercunto, Let it be considered, that God having made Man a rational Creature, and endowed him with a Power of Choice; does not irresistably compel him to any thing; only *sets before him* Good and Evil, *Life and Death, Blessing and Cursing*, Deut. 30. 19. with sufficient Motives, to choose the one, and reject the other; but with full and free Liberty, at the same time, to do which of the two he pleases; and therefore if never so many Men do oppose or persecute the true Religion, notwithstanding the most convincing Proofs that are offered in the behalf of it; or having embraced it, do yet live contrary to the Rules and Precepts of it, or even again renounce or forsake it; all this is only an Argument of
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Sect. XXI. *by the Test of Reason.* 55

their own Pride, Covetousness, Sensuality, or whatever else it is that they suffer to prevail in them in opposition to their Duty; but makes nothing at all against Religion, which ought always to be judged of, by the direct Proof and Evidence that is brought for it, and not barely by the Reception it meets with in the World; especially if we consider how very often Mens Lust, Passions, and Prejudices are permitted to get almost an entire Ascendant over their Reason.

§. XXI. If it be here demanded, Why did not God at first create, and afterwards preserve Man in greater Perfection, as to his intellectual Powers, than it seems he has done? Why does he not give him an Understanding as well qualified to discern Truth from Error, and Good from Evil, as a good Eye is to distinguish Light from Darkness; and also a Will immutably fixt upon the former, and always averse to the latter? For if this had been done, the Consequence would be, that every Man would most certainly embrace the true Religion, as soon as it should be proposed to him; and when he had once embraced it, would always retain and live according to it.

I answer, *First*, That whatever intellectual or other Perfections God might have given unto Mankind; as long as they come short of being infinite, (of which no created being is, I suppose, or can be capable) there would still be room for this same Question, *Why has not God given them greater Perfections?* For the greater Perfections a rational Creature is endowed with, the greater degree of Happiness is he capable of: And since it is natural for every such Creature to desire to be as happy as possibly can be; if the Will of the Almighty Creator is not to set bounds unto that Desire, and to be the rule of it; a way is opened

for a perpetual Expostulation of all the rational part of the Creation, against their Creator: *The Thing formed may for ever say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus?* Rom. 9. 20. And Angels as well as Men may say to God, Why hast thou not given us still a greater degree of Perfection, that so we might be able to attain to the like degree of Happiness?

But, *Secondly*, Altho' it is altogether inconsistent with God's infinite Goodness, that he should create any sort of Beings; and without any Fault by them committed, should put them into a State of unavoidable Misery; yet, on the other hand, it is most certain, that he neither is nor can be a *Debtor* to any of his Creatures, beyond what he, by his own voluntary Promise, at any time thinks fit to make himself: And therefore whatever portion of Good he is pleased to bestow on any of them, it is an Instance of his Bounty and Beneficence to the Work of his Hands: And as he who has received but one Talent, is accountable for no more but what he has received; so is he as truly obliged to be content with, and thankful for it, as any other that is entrusted with a greater number.

And here let me a little expostulate this matter with those Men, who, by such sort of Demands and Objections as these, do presume to arraign and call in question the infinite *Wisdom* and *Goodness* even of God himself. Of both these Attributes, as well as of his Almighty *Power*, he has given us abundant Evidence both in the Structure of the World, and the Revelation and Propagation of Christian Religion: But, say some, the World is not as well contrived, nor the several Parts of it; and Beings that belong to it, as perfect as they might have been: And hence they
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would infer, either that it was not made by God at all, or that he is not as Wise and Good as we would represent him. And the like Objection they frame against Christianity; because Multitudes that profess it, live contrary to it; and many Millions have gone off the Stage, and still continue to do so, without ever having had the least Knowledge or Instruction in it.

But what intolerable Arrogance is this, thus to deny or even doubt of, the Wisdom and Goodness of God, (for which such unanswerable Arguments are produced) only because our short and narrow Understanding is not able to fathom or comprehend them. Do we know the *utmost Design* that God has in framing of the *Universe*, and each and every Part thereof, with all and every the Creatures that are, or, for ought we know, may be in the several Regions of it, and the farthest Extent of that Subordination, which all these Creatures have one to another, in order to that Design? And if every created Being has Perfection sufficient for that end, for which God made it, is not this enough for that Station in which it is placed? No doubt but God, if he so pleased, might have made the craggy Hills and Mountains, most fruitful and delightful Plains; but if he has thought fit to have these great Unevenesses in the Earth, for the better supplying of the whole with Rain, Fountains and Rivers; Dare we take upon us to find fault with his Workmanship? He might have caused the Earth to produce not only all sorts of Fruit and Corn, without any Tillage, but also Houses ready fitted for the Reception and Habitation of Man; But shall we grumble, because matters are so ordered that we cannot have these things without the Intervention of our own Care and Industry? He might have given rational
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Souls to the Brutes, and created Man with all the Perfections of an Angel; but if he has thought fit to make them just such as they are, that the Beasts may be the more serviceable to Man, and Man undergo a Tryal here, in order to his Reward or Punishment hereafter; Ought not this rather to raise our Admiration of the Divine Wisdom and Goodness, than to move us in the least to call them in question? And lastly, (to omit all other Instances) It was and is always in his Power to give every Man throughout the whole World, most full and perfect Information of all the Doctrines and Precepts of Christianity, together with the Grounds and Reasons of them: But he has not done so; And who can tell whether he intends, at the last Day, to call any Man to an account for more than what he has received? That is to say, for the Abilities and Opportunities, which in his Life-time he had, of gaining Knowledge of the Truth, and putting that Knowledge into practice, in that Place and Station wherein he in his Providence has thought fit to place him.

To conclude this Point, If Man will but allow that God is or may be very much wiser than himself, he will easily be content with those most pregnant Proofs he has so clearly given us, both of his infinite Wisdom and Goodness, as well as Power; and whatever comes to pass that human Reason is not able otherwise to account for, he will always believe it to be designed and directed by God to some good End, in order to the better and more regular Administration of the Universe; altho' we at present have no way of coming to the particular Knowledge of it. A thousand things may, with the greatest Justice and Prudence, be transacted and done by a Prince and his

his Council, of which every private Man, tho' of very good Understanding in his own proper Affairs, may yet, from the outward appearance, be able to frame no competent Judgment; and for any of us to call in question the Wisdom or Goodness of God's Administration, (of which the Reasons are altogether beyond our Capacity) is not only very great Presumption, but altogether as foolish also and absurd, as if a deaf Man should pass his Judgment on the distinction of Sounds, or a Man born blind on the difference of Light and Colours.

§. XXII. But the Presumption of some Men goes yet farther, and demands, What Necessity there is of any Revealed Religion at all? Does not Reason, if duly attended to, most certainly inform us of the Being of God, together with his Attributes of Wisdom, Power, Justice and Goodness? And may we not from these Attributes as evidently infer what his Will also is, as far as we are concerned in it; that is to say, as far as it is either a Rule of Duty to us, or a Ground to hope for a Reward, if we obey; and to expect Punishment, in case we are Disobedient? Read those Authors who have learnedly and judiciously handled these Subjects, and you will find the Truth and Authority of *Natural Religion* so fully demonstrated; the Duties of it, as they respect both God and Man, so clearly described, and their Obligation so evidently proved; as to require nothing more but Conformity and Obedience thereunto, to render Man as happy as he is capable of in this Life; and sufficiently to qualify him for whatever farther Happiness God hath been pleased to design for him in that which is to come: And all this from the Principles of Reason alone, and antecedent to any manner of Revelation.

tion. Since then the very utmost Design of Religion is to make Men happy here, and qualify them for happiness in the Life to come; and all this may sufficiently be provided for by Reason alone, if every Man would but impartially follow it; Why should we imagine that God hath made any supernatural Revelation of Religion at all, since the utmost End that he can be supposed thereby to propose to himself, may as well be accomplished by every Man's attending to that Light of Reason, which his Creator hath implanted in his very Nature?

But suppose we were altogether unable to discover the least Necessity of Revelation; Would it follow from hence that therefore there neither is, nor can be any such thing? Whether God hath been ever pleased to make any supernatural Revelation of himself or his Will, is a Question of *Fact*; and if a *Fact* be sufficiently proved by proper Arguments, that is to say, by the Testimony of unexceptionable Witnesses; Is it reasonable for any Man to say, that the thing is not so, only because he cannot tell why it should be so? And may not God in his infinite Wisdom see very just Causes for the doing of many things, of which we may be altogether ignorant? Whosoever doth but a little consider both the Clearness and Boundlessness of God's Knowledge, and compares it with the Darkness and Narrowness of Man's Understanding, can never sure have the Confidence to make such sort of Objections as these.

However let us yield a little to debate this matter with the Objectors. There is no doubt to be made but God, if he had so pleased, might much farther have enlightned every Man's natural Understanding than what he hath done, and thereby alone, without any supernatural Revelation, have

Sect. XXII. *by the Test of Reason.* 61

have given them such an insight into things Divine, as that their Reason alone might have been a sufficient Rule both of Faith and Practice to them. But the Question is not at present, *What God might have done; but what he actually hath done;* and if he hath thought fit to superadd to Reason another and farther Rule of Revelation, Will any Man venture to say that he hath not sufficient Authority for so doing?

But where is the *necessury*, say they, of Revelation, since God might have governed the whole World; as it is manifest he hath done a great part of it, without it? And shall we suppose the All-wise God to have done any thing that is *unnecessary*, or (in other terms) in vain?

I answer, That if by *necessury* here is meant an *absolute and unavoidable Necessity*, it is most evident that God (whose freedom of Action is essential to his infinite Perfection) has done very many things without any such *necessury* as this incumbent on him: Nor can any other account be given, Why he made the World, and all the several sorts of Beings that are in it, and endowed them severally with such various Properties and Powers as are found to be in them? but that it was his own Good-will and Pleasure so to do; and that in order to such Ends and Purposes, as he, in his infinite Wisdom, thought fit to lay down and establish.

But if by *necessury*, no more is meant but only a great congruity and aptitude, in order to the bringing about some wise and good End; then in answer to the Question proposed, I return these following things.

First, It is not to be doubted, but that God may have many wise and great Ends to accomplish; and may adapt the most proper means to each

each several End, far beyond what we poor shallow Mortals are able (at least whilst we are in this Life) to comprehend. Although therefore we could see no manner of necessity for Revelation, in order to any End that we can imagine, it will not follow but that God may know it to be highly necessary, and by much the most proper means for the bringing to Effect certain Designs of his own, which in themselves are most wise and good; although as yet perhaps altogether unknown, or unfathomable to us.

Secondly, As far as the Ends which God hath proposed to himself are made known to us, or we are able to dive into them, it evidently appears, that those several Revelations, which he hath been pleased to make of himself and of his Will to the World, were in their own nature very proper, (and in that Sence *necessary*) in order to the accomplishment of them.

All sober Men who own that there is a God, allow him, at the same time, to be infinitely *Wise, Good and Just*; and therefore whatever he does in pursuance of any *one* of these Attributes, must always be supposed to be fully consistent with the *other two*.

From the Relation also that rational Creatures bear both to God, and to each other; it is granted that there arise certain unchangable Riches, or Measures of Moral Good and Evil, which we call *Natural Laws*.

Whatever is morally Evil, God cannot do, because it is directly contrary to his very Nature and essential Attributes.

Now God having made Man a rational as well as sensitive Creature, and given him an immortal Soul, as well as a mortal Body, one End or Design, which his Wisdom and Goodness are always

ways supposed to have had in the Creation of such a Being, was to put him into a capacity of being Eternally Happy in another Life, after this shall have an end.

One essential part of the Happiness of a rational Creature, as such, necessarily consists in the Satisfaction that arises from his having voluntarily given Obedience to such *natural Laws*, or *unchangable Rules of Good*, as are above mentioned; for where Reason exerts its self, and this Satisfaction is wanting, Remorse of Conscience must arise, which is always destructive of Happiness.

And if a rational Creature obstinately continues in Disobedience to those Laws, without any true Repentance or Amendment; it would be contrary to God's essential *Justice* to make such a Creature eternally happy, if we could suppose him, while he so continued, to be capable of it.

Granting then what both sides agree in, That God at first sent Man into this World as a Candidate for eternal Happiness, to be obtained by his Obedience to these same Laws; and endowed him with Reason and Understanding sufficient to make a full Discovery of them; if all the Revelations that he hath thought fit to make, should appear only to be *consistent* with this Design; even this alone were sufficient abundantly to justify him (whose Authority over his Creatures hath no other Limits but his own Goodness) in the making of them.

Let all the Revelations then that God hath made (as they are recorded both in the Old and New Testament) be strictly examined and enquired into; and what even seeming *Inconsistency* can there be found between any of them, and any one of those *natural* and *unchangable* Laws, which by Reason we are able to discover?

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But you will say that there are many things in the *Old* and some in the *New Testament*, which though not *inconsistent with*, yet are altogether *superadded* to the *natural Laws*: I grant it, but then let it be considered.

First, That God hath an undoubted Authority to lay what *positive Injunctions* he thinks fit upon his own Creatures: Nor can such *Injunctions* be any other way made known unto us than by Revelation.

Secondly, That when once such *Injunctions* are made known, our Obedience to them becomes a Duty, by virtue of that general Sanction of the *natural Law*, That *God is to be obeyed in all things*.

Thirdly, That most, if not all, of those *positive Injunctions*, which God hath at any time been pleased to lay on Men, have always been designed, and in their own nature fit, for the better Enforcement of the Duties of the *natural Law*; either by awakening them into a more awful apprehension of the Divine Majesty, or being as it were a Fence about certain Precepts of the *natural Law*, to keep them at the greater distance from the Transgression of them.

Fourthly, That a very great and most material (that is to say all that we call the Moral) part of whatever Revelation God hath been pleased to make, is no more but a clear and full Declaration of those very Duties, which by the *natural Law* we are obliged to perform; and consequently no small help to our Reason; which, wherever this Light of Revelation hath been wanting, hath not been sufficient to keep Men from the most great and gross Absurdities in matters that relate to God and Religion.

And lastly, Whereas it is very hard to suppose, that such a Creature as Man should take much Pains,

Pains, and encounter many Difficulties in the Discharge of his Duty; unless he were awed on the one hand by the Fear of Punishment; and on the other, encouraged by the Hope of some Assistance here, and a sufficient Reward hereafter; and the Doctrines of God's punishing the Wicked, and both assisting and rewarding of good Men, are but somewhat obscurely suggested to us by Reason alone; It certainly must be allowed as highly agreeable to God's Design in the Creation of Mankind, that these things should be more clearly and fully made known unto us by Revelation; thereby to work the more effectually both upon our Hopes and our Fears, in order to keep us up close to our Duty, notwithstanding the many Difficulties and Discouragements which we often meet with in the Performance of it.

True, it may be you will say, that God hath sufficient Power and Authority, not only by Revelation to assist our Reason; but also by the same Means to make known Truths, and lay positive Injunctions on us in Matters of Religion, beyond what Reason of it self could possibly discover; may well enough be granted; but still the Difficulty remains, and it will be asked; Why this Revelation (if any such there hath been) hath not from time to time been universally made to all Mankind; but always hath, and still is confined to so small a Number?

But this Question plainly supposes the *Necessity* of Revelation in the Sense that we maintain it; that is to say, the great Congruity and Usefulness of it; and demands only why the Extent of it is not universal to each particular Man. To which having already given, I think, a sufficient Answer, I shall not tire the Reader with an unnecessary Repetition of it.

Only this I think I may very well add, that it is at least highly probable, that almost all the Knowledge which we have in the World even of natural Law and Religion is wholly owing to Revelation. As in Geometry (for Example) a most difficult Theoreme, when it is once demonstrated, is so plain to the Reason of every Man who understands the Demonstration; that every Man is very apt to think that he could himself have found it out; and yet thousands of good Geometricians there are, and have been, who never would [of themselves] have found out the Demonstrations of that Science, or have had any Notion of them, if they had not been taught by others; so although the Doctrines and Rules of natural Law and Religion are, in my Opinion, demonstrably deducible from such Principles as every Man in his Wits must allow to be true; yet supposing the Reason of Mankind to be just the same as now it is; it is very plain that few or perhaps none, would have made any Deduction; or at least have gone very far in it; if the Minds of some Men had not been enlightened by Revelation; and that Light in a greater or less Measure derived down unto others.

When God first made Man he did not leave him only to gather what Knowledge he could by the Strength of his own Reason, from the Works of the Creation and the Order and Course of Nature; but gave him what Instruction was farther necessary by immediate Revelation, Gen. 1. 28. &c. whereby Adam was also enabled to teach and instruct, and propagate Knowledge amongst his Posterity.

This way of teaching us by immediate Revelation God was pleased even after the Fall of Man, in some Measure to continue; as appears in the Account which the Holy Scripture gives us of Cain, and

and *Abel, Noah, Abraham, Joseph, Moses,* and the Prophets; and after some Intermission, to renew the same by *Jesus Christ* and his Apostles.

And that some Footsteps of *some* of these Revelations [at least] did, almost as universally as Mankind, spread themselves, and for a very long time Remain throughout the whole World, appears I think most plainly from that custom of worshipping the Deity by *Sacrifices*, which every where was retained amongst all Nations, as far as we have any Account of them in ancient History, whether true or fabulous. Of which universal Custom, every where prevailing amongst the most distant People, no rational account can be given from any of the Principles of *Natural Religion*; nor indeed any other but this one (that will bear the utmost Test) *viz.* that it was first immediately taught unto Man by God himself; and then derived down and propagated from one Generation to another.

For to say nothing of *Cain and Abel*, (*Gen. 4. 3. 4.*) or what passed before the Flood; presently after it we find *Noah* (who had an immediate Intercourse with God by Revelation) *Building an Altar, and offering Burnt-offerings upon it, Gen. 8. 20.* and what he thus did himself, it cannot be doubted but he taught his Children also to do: Not to mention *Abraham*; from whom not only the *Ishmaelites* and *Israelites* (who were very numerous) but also several other Nations sprang, by those Children which his last Wife *Keitrah* bore unto him, *Gen. 25. 2.*

That some Knowledge also of the Religion of *Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses,* and the *Israelites* (which came to them by Revelation) must needs be propagated amongst the neighbouring Nations, where they dwelt, or any of them travelled;

velled; and particularly amongst the *Egyptians* and *Phenicians* (from whence it is notorious that all the *Grecian* Learning was derived) is what no one sure will deny that the *Israelitish* Religion became farther known in the World by the several Conquests, Dispersions, and Captivities of that People; by the Translation of their Scriptures into the *Greek* Tongue (very generally understood) about three hundred Years before the coming of Christ, is very natural to believe. And *Lastly*, that Christianity was in a few Years far and near propagated in the World, is as well known as any thing in History.

Now wherever any knowledge of the things in the above mentioned Revelations or any of them was propagated or received: Notwithstanding the many Errors, Corruptions, and Fables, which were therewith mixed; yet still it served as a ferment to stir up natural Conscience, and preserve some Sense of Religion amongst those Nations. And on the contrary wherever we find a People to have lost all Sense of Revelation and revealed Truths; scarce any Footsteps even of natural Religion are to be found amongst them.

Thus, for Example, It is notorious that the antient fabulous Theology, received by the *Grecians*, and from thence derived to the *Romans*, was in a great Measure a Corruption of, together with many Additions to some Part of those Revelations, which are contained in the Scriptures of the Old Testament, for the Proof of which we need go no farther, than the History of the Creation and Deluge, as it is related in the very beginning of *Ovid's Metamorphosis*; and how great a Sense of Religion, and Conscience, the Apprehension of these and such like things kept up in both those People, is too well known from their Histories to need any farther

ther Proof here. And after that Christianity began to be made known through the *Roman Empire*; It is remarkable that even the Heathen Writers exalted both Piety and Morality, to a higher and more spiritual Degree, than any of their Predecessors (though Men of as great Parts and Learning) had ever done before them: Which can probably be attributed to no other Cause but the Acquaintance which they had with some of the Notions of the Gospel.

On the contrary they who have travelled into those Countries, where the ancient Natives have lost all Sense or Apprehension of any such thing as Revelation; do assure us that they find among them so very little sign of any Worship of God, or Footstep even of natural Religion, that it is at least very doubtful whether they have any manner of Sense of God or Religion at all; of which (to omit others) the People called *Hottentots* at the *Cape of Good Hope*, are a very remarkable Instance.

I shall close my Answer to all the foregoing Objections with this one Consideration, which I take to be abundantly sufficient to surmount all the Difficulties that are or can be contained in them; namely that not only Revelation, but in a great Measure even Reason also, from the unequal Distribution of Good and Evil in this Life, assures us that there is a Life to come, and a great Day of Account in which Rewards and Punishments shall be most exactly dispenced; and all the [seeming] Inequalities of this World so thoroughly rectified and made even, that Virtue which hath sometimes here been oppressed shall have no farther Reason to complain, or bemoan it self; nor prosperous Vice any longer ground to triumph and rejoice. Then it shall appear to all the rational part of the Creation, that the Judge of all the
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earth doth nothing but what is right, Gen. 18. 25. And as the good and faithful servant (Mat. 25. 21.) shall be most amply rewarded; so the wicked and slothful one (v. 26.) shall be sufficiently punished; not for that he had but one Talent (v. 15.) committed to him, or Ability to manage no more, (neither of which are laid to his Charge as a Fault) but purely and only because he did not put his Lord's money to the Exchangers, v. 27. that is to say, did not make that due Improvement of the Stock with which he was entrusted, that he might and ought to have done. Then that servant which knew his Lord's Will and prepared not himself, neither did according to his Will, shall be beaten with many stripes: But he that knew not, and did commit things [in themselves] worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes; for unto whomsoever much is given, of him [alone] shall much be required, Luke 12. 47, 48. And as many as have sinned without [the Revealed] Law [of God] shall also perish without [being judged by that] Law; and as many as have sinned in the Law, shall be judged by the Law, Rom. 2. 12. For when the Gentiles which have not the [Revealed] Law, do by [the Light of] nature the things contained in the Law, these having not the [Revealed] Law, are a Law unto themselves, v. 14.

This World is but as a short Prelude to that vast Eternity that is to follow, and we being at present on the obscure side of the Curtain, cannot make a full and perfect Discovery of what is yet in a great measure concealed on the other side of it. But from the infinite Wisdom, Justice and Goodness of God, we may with all assurance conclude, That whenever the Scene shall be opened, and a full Discovery made to us of all that is to come, as far as we are concerned in the
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Knowledge of it; all things will appear so right and equitable, and what comes after so exactly fitted to whatever hath gone before, that without the least Scruple, Doubt or Suspicion, we shall all with one accord cry out, That *the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether*, Ps. 19. 9.

§. XXIII. But it may be objected, That there are very sufficient Arguments to prove, that the Jewish Religion was from God; and yet we maintain that it is superseded by Christianity; How then do we know, but that there is some other Religion, that comes into the place of the Christian; as the Christian has done into that of the Jewish? This indeed is the Pretence of the Mahometans; but the Answer to it is very easy.

Whatsoever things are of moral and eternal Goodness; whatsoever things are in their own nature *honest, just, pure and lovely*, Phil. 4. 8. are for ever the same, and unchangeable, and are all transmitted from Judaism into Christianity, and there contained in the highest degree of Perfection. But, for such as are only of positive Institution, as they are always supposed to be in themselves alterable by the same Authority that first appointed them, so is it no less than impossible that they should be all the same in the Christian, as they were in the Jewish Religion. The *Israelites*, for Example, who lived within a small Tract of Ground, were obliged by their Law to perform several Acts of Obedience, and Worship, at certain Times of the Year, at no other place but the House of God; which for many Years was the Temple of *Jerusalem*, where they who lived at the remoter Parts of the Earth, could not possibly give their Attendance: And this alone

alone (to omit many other Considerations) is enough to shew, that the positive part of the Mosaick Law, was only intended for that one People; and that too, no longer than they should remain distinct and separate from all other Nations. Moreover, in all the Revelations that God was pleased to make of himself, even from the very time of the Fall of Man, he still thought fit to give plain Intimations of farther Discoveries that were to be made of his Will to the World: As appears by the Promises made by him, That *the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head*, Gen. 3. 15. That *in the seed of Abraham all the nations of the earth should be blessed*, Gen. 22. 18. That *Shiloh should come, and unto him should the gathering of the people be*, ch. 49. 10. That God would raise up unto his people a Prophet, like unto Moses, whom they should hear, Deut. 18. 15, 18. And in a word, from all those Predictions in the Old Testament, which the Jews, as well as Christians, always did, and still do understand to foretel the coming of the Messiah; who was to tell them all things, John 4. 25. Whereas in all that Declaration of his Will, which in these last days God has been pleased to make unto the World by his Son, Heb. 1. 2. there is not the least Suggestion or Intimation, of any new or farther Revelation of his Will to be made; but altogether the contrary: As abundantly appears from many Passages in the New Testament; particularly, from the Promise of our Blessed Saviour, to be with his Disciples *always, even unto the end of the world*, (Mat. 28. 19, 20.) in the preaching of the Gospel, which he had commanded them to teach all Nations; and above all, from the frequent assurance he has given us, both by himself and his Apostles, That all who shall receive his

SECT. XXIV. *by the Test of Reason.* 73

his Doctrine, and conform themselves to it, shall inherit eternal life, Mark 16. 15, 16. John 3. 15, 16. which being the utmost Reward that Man is capable of receiving, shews, That that Obedience, to which this Reward is annexed, is the utmost that God Almighty does or ever will require, from any Man whatsoever. So that if once we allow the Christian Religion to be from God, (as I think the Proofs brought for it are beyond all imaginable Exceptions) we must of necessity also own, that this is the last Revelation of himself, or his Will, that ever he designs to make to the World; and consequently that all Pretences to new and farther Discoveries in Religion, can be no better than Imposture or Delusion.

§. XXIV. I proceed to the third Question? namely, *Why we are Protestants and not Papists; of the Reformed rather than the Roman Religion?*

Whatsoever Controversies have been raised, or different Opinions at any time maintained in the World concerning the divine Inspiration, Authority, Perfection, Interpretation, or Perspicuity of the Holy Scriptures; yet all who have ever professed Christianity with the least degree of Sobriety (whether Papists or Protestants, or of what other denomination soever they have been) have constantly and fully agreed in this; that whatever Doctrines or Rules of Life are clearly and plainly taught and contained in those sacred Writings; and are altogether agreeable to the main Tenor and Design of them; ought always to be received as true and obligatory to every Man as far as he has the Opportunity of coming to the Knowledge of them. Now the whole and intire Religion of a Protestant is no more but this; to believe and profess the Articles of the Apostles Creed, to be duly baptized with Water according to Christ's Institution, to

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lead a holy and vertuous Life in the diligent Practice of the Duties of Piety and Morality, frequently to participate of that holy Ordinance of Bread and Wine, which takes its Name from Christ's appointing it at his last Supper, and lastly to give all due Obedience to that lawful Authority both civil and ecclesiastical, which, in the Course of God's Providence, is placed over him: nor does any sober Protestant, that I know of, require more than this, as an essential part of Religion, or absolutely necessary, to the Salvation of any Christian: and that all this, is clearly, plainly, and beyond all Contradiction, contained and taught in the Holy Scriptures, and altogether agreeable to the main Tenor and Design of them, is not only most evident to every one who reads them; But also fully and freely owned and acknowledged by all those who are of the Church of *Rome*: which therefore we take to be a very sufficient Reason why we are of the Protestant Religion. For what Objection may be pretended against the *name* Protestant, as being new and unheard of till of late Years; yet nothing of that Nature can be more evident than that the Religion which we profess; as I have but now described it; is as antient as the first Propagation of the Gospel by the Apostles; being all of it most plainly contained in the Holy Scriptures.

It may perhaps be objected that the thirty nine Articles, received by our Church, are expressly called *Articles of Religion*; and the *Confessions*, by other Protestant Churches published, are usually stiled *Confessions of Faith*: Now that these *Articles* and *Confessions* do all of them contain much more than what I have but now set down as the whole Religion of a Protestant, is evident, and accordingly acknowledged; and if so, the Consequence
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must necessarily be, that the Faith or Religion of a Protestant includes a great deal more than what I have described to be in it.

To this the Answer will not be difficult if we consider that these Words, *Faith* and *Religion* are sometimes taken in a larger, and sometimes in a more contracted and limited Signification; sometimes they are put to signify that whole System of Doctrine which is authentickly received by any Church; tho' not all of it; as absolutely necessary to Church-Communion or eternal Salvation; yet as sound and true, and altogether agreeable to the Holy Scriptures, or whatever Rule of Faith or Religion is received, and owned by them: and in this Acceptation of the Words, the Faith or Religion of a Protestant may be said to contain more than what I have mentioned to be in it; But these same Words, as they are implied, tho' not express'd in my Text, are to be understood in the strictest Signification, to denote no more than what is ordinarily necessary to the Salvation of a Christian. My Text requires no more from us, but that we should be ready to give an Answer to every Man that asketh us a Reason of the hope that is in us; or in other Terms, Why we hope to be saved in, and by that Faith and Religion which we profess? But to give our Reasons why we believe some other Doctrines also to be true, (altho' we do not look upon them as ordinarily necessary to Salvation) however prudent and proper upon many occasions it may be; is yet beyond the Design of what my Text prescribes: Now if we take the Words *Faith* and *Religion*, in this Sense, for no more but what we esteem to be ordinarily necessary to the Salvation of every Christian; there is no sober Protestant, that I know of, who extends his *Faith* or *Religion*, beyond

those Bounds within which I have but now described it; that is to say, requires any more to be explicitly believed or practised, in order to the eternal Salvation of a Christian, than those several things that I have mentioned.

But still a part of the Question continues unanswered; nor will it be thought sufficient barely for us to shew, why we embrace our own Religion: But it will farther be expected that we should give our Reasons for refusing to join with the Church of *Rome*, in the Profession or Practice of what they, beyond this, would expect and require from us.

For the clearing up therefore of what remains, we must take notice that the difference between us and the Church of *Rome*, does not consist in this, That they deny any thing to be ordinarily necessary to Salvation, which we affirm so to be, excepting only the Cup in the Holy Communion: But the great difference between us lies in this, That in one Instance they have deprived the People of something, which by Christ's own appointment (as we apprehend) every Christian, that comes to Years of Understanding, ought to partake of; I mean the Cup in the Holy Communion. And in divers other Instances they have added to the Christian Religion, sundry Doctrines and Practices to be received by every one who is in Communion with them: which Doctrines and Practices we look on not only to be unnecessary, (for then perhaps we might in some things, for Peace sake, comply with them) but to be false and unlawful; and therefore such as with a good Conscience we cannot profess, or join with them in: And if we can make this our Allegation good, it is a sufficient Reason why we neither are nor will

Sect. XXIV. *by the Test of Reason.* 77

will be Papists; and so compleats our Answer to this third Question.

To come to the matter then in very few Words: If Christ's own appointment be a sufficient ground for that Obligation that lies upon all Christians to partake (as they become capable) of the Holy Communion, (which no sober Man of the Church of *Rome* ever yet, I believe, denied;) this holds altogether as strongly for drinking of the Cup, as it does for eating of the Bread. If that Doctrine which is directly contrary to the universal Sense and Reason of all Mankind, and to divers very plain Passages of Holy Scripture; and relies only and entirely upon a pretended literal Interpretation of one single form of Expression, (which, if it be once admitted, will as well prove our Blessed Saviour to be, in a literal Sence also, a *Vine*, a *Rock*, and a *Door*; with many other such Absurdities) if such a Doctrine as this, I say, may well be looked upon as false; then the Doctrine of Transubstantiation, as stated by the Council of *Trent*, cannot justly be received as true, and with it the Sacrifice of the Mass, and Worship of the Host, (both which entirely rely upon this Doctrine) must also fall to the Ground. If we must worship the Lord our God, and serve him only, as our Saviour expressly says, *Mat. 4. 10.* and if the first and second Commandments have still the same Meaning, and are of the same Obligation to us under the Gospel, as they were unto the *Israelites* under the Mosaick Dispensation; then the Invocation and Worship of Saints, Images and Relicks, as prescribed and practised in the Church of *Rome*, must of necessity be not only unlawful, but in a very high degree provoking unto God, who has declared himself to be a jealous God. The time would fail

me to speak of the Pope's Claim of Supremacy, his or his Churches pretended Infallibility, Purgatory, Indulgences, Masses for the Dead, private Masses, Auricular Confession, Penance and Satisfaction for Sins, Merits, Works of Supererogation, Pilgrimages, and all the long Train of Errors, and unlawful or unwarrantable Practices, which under the Name and Pretence of *Apostolick and Ecclesiastical Traditions, Observations and Constitutions of the Church*, are imposed upon the Members of that Communion; and must, under the Penalty of *Anathema*, be owned and approved of by them: All which things, being seriously weighed and considered, we cannot but conclude, That as we have sufficient ground for most heartily embracing the Christian Religion, as it is in all Protestant Churches generally professed and declared to be necessary to Salvation, so have we abundant reason, for the rejecting all those Additions which the Church of *Rome* has made to it, or Alterations in it; and consequently for refusing to join with that Church (as long as it continues thus corrupted) in religious Worship or Communion. And thus I have at last done with the third Question proposed; namely, *Why we are Protestants, and neither are nor will be Papists?*

§. XXV. The fourth Question yet remains; namely, *Why we are Protestants of the Established Church, and not of any Party that dissents or divides from her?* To which, I think a fair and satisfactory Answer may in very few Words be given.

Whatever all sober Protestants (I might add also and divers learned Papists) do maintain to be necessary to the Salvation of a Christian; we can shew it all fully and freely to be had and enjoyed in our Church. We believe and profess the

SECT. XXV. *by the Test of Reason.* 79

the true Faith, as delivered in the Creed; we are all received into the Church by Baptism; we are taught to lead holy and virtuous Lives; no part of Christ's Institution is omitted in the Administration of the Holy Communion; we have Governors, both Ecclesiastical and Civil, lawfully set over us, to whom we are required to give Obedience so far, and no farther than as the Law of God prescribes: Nor does any sober Protestant (as I have already said) require any more than this, as an essential part of Religion, or of absolute necessity to our everlasting Happiness.

Again, Some things may perhaps be esteemed as profitable in order to Salvation, altho' they cannot be reckoned to be of absolute necessity: And whatever there is or may be of this sort, may as fully and beneficially be enjoyed amongst us, as in any Society of Christians whatsoever: He, who is a Member of our Church, may read the Holy Scriptures and other good Books, attend the Worship of God both publicly and privately, hear Sermons, keep Days of Fasting or Abstinence, and do every thing else that any way tends to his Soul's Health: And this as much and as often as he pleases, or can any way conduce to his spiritual or eternal Welfare.

Nor is there any thing prescribed in or required, by our Church, that is any way destructive of Salvation, or in the least a hindrance to it. Nothing but Sin can any way be a bar to the Salvation of him that professes Christianity; nor can any thing be reckoned as a Sin, 1 John 3. 4. except it be, either expressly or by good consequence, a transgression of the Law of God; and *where no Law is, there is no Transgression.* Rom. 4. 15. Now however some of our

Ceremonies or Ecclesiastical Constitutions may not be altogether agreeable to the Fancies or Desires of those who refuse them, and whatever other Objections are or may be artificially contrived against them; yet still there is not any one thing required to be performed by any Member of our Communion, that can be proved to be *contrary to any of God's Laws*, or therefore can justly be condemned as any way destructive of Salvation.

Now wherever a Church is by Law established, in which all things any way necessary or profitable to Salvation, may fully and freely be had and enjoyed, and nothing at all destructive of Salvation is imposed upon any Man: From such a Church as this, no Man ought to separate; and every one that lives within the Precincts of it, ought constantly to continue in its Communion. And altho' there may be some things in its Constitution that are not so agreeable to his particular, relish; yet as long as he can without Sin (and therefore with a good Conscience) conform to them; he ought not on the Score of any such things as these, either to break the Unity, or disturb the Peace of the Church, or refuse his Obedience to lawful Authority: and this I take to be a sufficient and satisfactory Answer to this fourth and last Question.

§. XXVI. But there are two difficulties that arise upon the whole, which I must endeavour to clear up before I conclude.

First then, it will perhaps be objected by those of the Church of *Rome*. That however fair, and well put together, all these Arguments, brought for the Proof of our Religion, may, at the first view, appear to be; yet, when the Strength of them comes to be strictly examined, they will at best be found to be no more but *Probable*, and far short of

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Infallibility: Now the highest *Probability*, say they, still includes and implies some small Degree, at least of *Uncertainty*; and consequently cannot be a Ground sufficiently firm, on which a Man may venture his eternal Salvation: and for this Reason they decry all other Men's Perswasion in Religion but their own, which they say is supported by the *Infallibility* of their Church; and therefore is beyond even the Possibility of failing.

But would these Men have us build our Faith upon the *Infallibility* of their Church, without any Proof at all brought for it; or have they sufficient Arguments to convince and satisfy us of the Truth and Reality of such *Infallibility*? The former of these is altogether absurd; nor do they demand so foolish and unreasonable a thing from us: If then they undertake first to bring sufficient Proof of their *Infallibility*, before they would have us receive or acknowledge it, I demand farther, is this same Proof, in its self, infallible or not? If not, then what are we the better for the pretended *Infallibility* of a Church, which has not infallible Arguments to support it? But if their Proof be *in it self* infallible, it will follow that there is an *infallibility* antecedent to that of the Church; And why may we not suppose, that the Truth of Religion may thereby be proved as well antecedently to the *Infallibility* of the Church, as the *Infallibility* of the Church antecedently to the Truth of Religion.

Again, whatever Arguments they offer for the Proof of their pretended *Infallibility*, must be, and accordingly are always drawn either from Reason, or Scripture, or both in conjunction together; from which same Fountains we also directly bring our Proofs for the establishing of the

the Truth of our Religion: Now let their Arguments for their Infallibility, and ours for our Religion, be well compared the one with the other; and it will soon appear to every impartial Man, that those which we bring immediately in the behalf of Religion, are by much the most conclusive of the two. Nor can they of the Church of *Rome* pretend to offer one single Word in behalf of their Infallibility: but upon a Supposition that the Being of God, and the Truth of Christianity are first sufficiently established upon the Proofs which are common both to us and them: So that whatever strength they may fancy to be in their Arguments for the Infallibility of their Church, it must all of necessity depend upon those that are, antecedently thereto, brought for the Establishing of Religion, and Christianity in general: From whence these two Consequences must unavoidably follow; *First*, That no Man's Belief of Religion and Christianity in the general can justly in the least depend upon the supposed Infallibility of the Church; and, *Secondly*, That if from Reason and Scripture, as good or better Arguments may be immediately had for the Establishing of the particular Doctrines of Christianity, than are brought for the Proof of this pretended Infallibility: We may as well, nay we had much better receive such particular Doctrines upon the Proof that so may be brought for them, than endeavour to lay the stress of them upon such an Infallibility, as cannot be so well proved as they themselves may be without it. And indeed when it is considered how much the Writers of the Church of *Rome* are puzzled, either where to place their pretended Infallibility, or how to make any sort of Proof of it, it may well amaze every sober Man to find

find them with so much Confidence insisting upon a thing, which, on a sober Examination, appears to be no better than a Fiction or Hypothesis, contrived to serve a Turn, and void of all satisfactory Proof or Reality.

But it is not enough, that we can so abundantly retort this Objection upon the Church of *Rome*; for notwithstanding this, the Difficulty still remains, and requires another kind of Solution: In order whereunto, it must indeed be freely granted, that in all matters of great Moment and Consequence (where we suppose every Man willing to run as little hazard as possibly may be) if strict and *infallible Certainty* can be obtained, no Man ought to stop short of it, or to content himself with any degree of *bare Probability*, how great soever it may appear to be. But let us suppose, either that the matter in debate will not admit, or that the Person who makes the Enquiry, is incapable of this sort of absolute Certainty; What must be done in such a Case as this? A Man, for Example, expects in all probability to be ruined, if he does not take a Journey of a hundred Miles: Now, because it cannot be mathematically demonstrated to him that he shall come safe to the place whither he would travel; that he shall neither break his Bones by a Fall from his Horse, nor be drowned in crossing of a Ferry, nor murdered by Highway-Men, nor perish upon the Road by any other Accident; because these things, I say, cannot be strictly demonstrated, must he therefore resolve to stay at Home, at all Hazards, and not make the best Preparation he can for his Journey? If any Man thinks he can produce better Proofs, for Religion, than those we already have; no doubt
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but every Man, as far as he is capable, ought fairly to weigh and consider them: But if we already have as much as may abundantly satisfy every sober and impartial Man, and the Arguments for Religion do vastly over-balance those few trifling Pretences that are brought against it; must we suddenly sit down (and that with the greatest Hazard of eternal Misery) in Atheism, Scepticism, or Infidelity; for no other reason but that we have not that *strict, infallible Proof* of things, which neither does their Nature require, nor our own perhaps is capable of receiving?

§. XXVII. The other Difficulty which arises upon this Discourse, is, That however rational and satisfactory all this Account which we give of our Religion may, to Men of Sense and Understanding, appear to be; yet the vulgar sort, which are much the greatest part of Mankind, are not only ignorant of it all, but even altogether incapable of apprehending the Force of the several Arguments contained in it; as will soon appear to any Man that makes the Experiment. Either then we must suppose numberless Millions of Men to be under no Obligation, of embracing or professing any Religion at all, or the foundation of such Obligation must be laid upon some other and plain-er Account of things, that may not be above the Reach of their Capacity.

For answer hereunto, I desire that these two things may be duly considered.

First, That many Men there are in the World, who have a very sufficient Understanding of much more than what in Words they are well able to express. For Example; A Man altogether illiterate, conscientiously follows the business of his

Sect. XXVII. *by the Test of Reason.* 85

particular Calling with Prudence and Discretion; which plainly shews that he has a just and right Notion of things, so far at least as to guide and direct him in his private Affairs: But if upon many occasions you desire him in Words to express the Grounds and Reasons of what he does, you will find him, being no Master at all of Language, but very imperfectly able to do it: Now let us suppose the same Man (which very often is the Case) to be very regular in the Performance of all the Duties of Religion; constant in the Worship of God, both publick and private; frequent at the Holy Communion; Just, True, Sober, Temperate, Charitable, and obedient to lawful Authority; and all this, as far as ever we are able to judge, upon a true Principle of Conscience; Is not such constant and uniform Regularity of his Life and Actions, as clear a Proof that he has also a due Apprehension of the things of Religion, sufficient to direct and support him through God's Grace in the Practice of it: Altho' at the same time, if you ask him a *Reason of the Hope that is in him*, and of all that he does - on that account, his Answer, as to the outward form of Expression, will appear but weak and imperfect: And must be supplied, as to that Defect, by the Discretion and Charity of him that makes the Enquiry. It is therefore a great Mistake if we conclude, that Men understand little or nothing of Religion, or the reason of it, only because they know not how to cloth their Thoughts with Words or Expressions, that carry any tolerable Propriety in them: In many Cases a Man's Actions much more certainly than his Words, do shew what his Judgment is, and

and what are the inward Thoughts and Sentiments of his Mind.

Secondly, If we rightly distinguish between Religion strictly and properly so called (which comprehends no more but what is ordinarily required for the Salvation of every Man) and Notions or Doctrines, whether false or true which have been mixed with, and by many adopted into it; whatever Abstruseness or Difficulty may occur in many of the latter; there is nothing in the former (I mean as far as it is necessary to be understood) or in the Grounds or Reasons of it, that is above the Capacity of every Man of common Understanding that soberly and diligently makes enquiry into it. The Nature of God, the Extent of his Attributes, and the utmost Depth of all those Mysteries which *in part* are only revealed unto us in the Gospel, (1 Cor. 13. 9.) are altogether as incomprehensible and unfathomable to the learned as to the unlearned: But what Man almost is there of so mean a Capacity, that may not, with moderate Instruction and due Attention thereunto be fully and rationally convinced of the Being and chief Attributes of God, from the very Structure of the World; of the Truth of Christianity from the well attested Prophecies and Miracles, (besides its own internal Goodness) whereby it is confirmed; and lastly, of all those Doctrines and Rules of Life that are necessary to Salvation, from the main Tenour and Design of the Holy Scriptures, in which all Sorts of Christians do agree, as I have already, tho' briefly set forth the whole matter, it is not every Man indeed who may be capable of Disputing, or maintaining an Argument for Religion, as I have already said: But if Men generally do not understand as much of it as is necessary to
Sal-

Salvation, nor are able to give some tolerable Account (however imperfectly express) why they hope to be saved in and by it, the Fault is not that the thing it self is above their capacity: But either that they want good and plain Instruction, or else will not give sufficient Attention to it; and let thus much suffice to have been spoken to the second Difficulty.

§. XXVIII. And now, for a conclusion of all: I have only this to add; That whatever Knowledge or Understanding in Religion, or the Grounds and Reasons of it any Man may have, if he does not carefully and conscientiously bring forth the Fruit of it in a truly vertuous and pious Life; it will be so far from being of any Advantage to him, that, on the contrary, it will most certainly turn to his greater Condemnation; *the Servant who knows not his Lord's Will, and, by Reason of his Ignorance, commits things in themselves worthy of Stripes, has something to plead in excuse for himself (at least if his Ignorance be not through his own Fault or Neglect) and shall be beaten but with few Stripes, but that Servant who knows his Lord's Will, and yet prepares not himself, neither does according to his Will; such a Servant as this, not only in the highest Degree affronts his Lord; But also gives great Scandal and evil Example to his Fellow-servants; and therefore is most justly sentenced to be beaten with many Stripes; for unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required, Luke 12. 47, 48.*

F I N I S.

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